

BEADLE'S HALF DIME Library

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Vol. II.

Single
Number.

BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 37.

The Hidden Lodge; OR, The Little Hunter of the Adirondacks

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CHAPTER I.

FALLING THROUGH A GHOST.

"LOST! Thar's no denyin' the predicament now. Hyar's the log what I fell over awhile back, an' by hokey, hyar's the powder-horn what I thought I lost on the banks of that black river! We been goin' round an' round like a top. Kin ye see anything, Simon?"

"Nuthin'; not even a star."
"That's encouragin'! The old moss sign fools me hyar. This must be the devil's own land, an' ef I live to see daylight one man will make tracks for civilization. Hear that roarin' water! It's the Ausable. It hollers like a pack of wolves let loose by one of the imps of these terrible woods."

"What are we goin' to do?"

"Stay hyar till day lets a little light upon this subject," was the reply. "Ef we'd move ag'in, wouldn't we go round an' round an' bring up ag'in this big black log every time! Thank God thar's no moose brush hyar to zip a fellar with its wet leaves an' make one mad. Simon, we've been fools, confounded fools! Don't ye see that he sent us here to get lost and die somewhere in this devil-land? Let me out o' this, an' I'll go back. By the jumpin' jingo, I'll go back an' take every cent from him or send him to the gallows!"

"Don't carry on that way, Tarsus. We hevn't been hyar long enough to get the hang of things. We'll strike the trail soon, an' make a pile. I'm goin' to stay. Didn't come hyar to give the matter up so soon."

In the gloom of an Adirondack forest stood the two men between whom the foregoing conversation passed, one March night in the early part of the present century.

They were rough characters, as their words indicated, and were in no enviable frame of mind, for, despite their famous woodcraft, they had become bewildered, and were forced to conclude, which they did with many curses, that they were lost.

The men were veritable giants. Their garments, dragged at the ankles and damp elsewhere, for a drizzling rain had been falling for several hours, chilled them to the bones, and the cold wind that swept through the wet boughs of hemlock and pine made their teeth chatter.

It was near ten o'clock when, for the second time, the man called Tarsus—Tarsus Nightwell was his name—stumbled over the half-decayed log. The second accident confirmed his unwelcome suspicions—that they were traveling in that bewildering circle which is so terrible to the unlucky children of the wood. The camp might be far away, over leagues of wet woodland and miles of mountains, or nestling quite near in its tenantless security, well stocked with venison and fowl which the appetites of the two lost giants craved. They did not know where it was.

The roar of waters which came through the impenetrable gloom to their ears was the dash-

ing of the Ausable as it rushed through one of those awful gorges which to-day is the delight and wonder of the hunter and the tourist. During their circumnavigation of a certain center of forest land, Tarsus Nightwell and his companion had not passed beyond the sound of that mad river. At times, of course, the roar was not so distinct; but it grated harshly upon their ears, and made them shudder.

To them—strong men and rough as they were—the thought of passing a night in the heart of the Adirondack country was absolute horror. This was heightened by the truth of their situation. Put the twain by the old log at midnight, but with the trail to camp in their minds, and they would have laughed at the Ausable, and told stories with zest about the pinneries of Maine.

Lose a brave man in a strange forest at night, and his heart will grow still at the sounds that assail his ear, or at the thoughts that throng his brain.

Twice during the tramp of the wildering circle, Nightwell had tried to build a fire; but the winds murdered his little blaze before it had time to die among the damp burrs and damper leaves.

"I wish he was hyar, 'pon my word I do," growled Tarsus Nightwell. "Thar's no gal hid in these woods, and the Injuns are mighty scarce, too. It's a wild-goose chase, an' he knowed it would be sich when he sent us off. Simon, thar's somethin' mighty deceitful in man."

But the man called Simon did not respond. He was feeling the trunk of a tree—running his hand over it as if hunting for something of value.

"Yer right, Tarsus," he said, rising with a sigh of chagrin. "The bark, the old moss sign, ar' ag'in' us. Thar's no north side to these trees."

"An' none to the wind," growled Nightwell. "Put up yer hand an' try it, Simon. Why, in other woods I could tell which way was which by the blowin' of the wind; but now tell if ye dare!"

"I tried that twenty times to-night. This is an awful country. Everything contrary hyar. Why, I believe the needle would stand straight on end an' pint to the sky."

"Ef thar is one over these infernal woods."

After awhile the lost giants determined to push toward the river, which, from the sound of its cavernous dashings, might be five or six miles distant.

They wanted to break the



THE LITTLE HUNTER DESCENDS TO THE HIDDEN LODGE.

horror of "circle traveling"—to pass over its boundaries and dissipate the spell and superstition which sat like sheeted specters in their hearts.

They started forward, refreshed by the rest, Tarsus Nightwell in advance. They trailed their long rifles at their sides, and kept their ears trained to catch the slightest suspicious sounds.

The journey through the nocturnal forest was necessarily slow. It led them over high hills and through rocky gorges, out of which naught but their experienced woodcraft brought them without broken limbs.

The sound of the Ausable grew more distinct, and it at last became evident that the spell of bewilderment had been broken.

They were in a country where the hemlocks were young, a good place for the shy deer, and their enemy, the ravenous wolf.

It was in this place that Nightwell, communing with his superstitious thoughts, started when Simon's hand fell upon his shoulder, and pressed his wet garments upon his skin. The giant began a sentence of expletives which his companion quickly broke.

"Sh! Stop an' listen! By the holy stars we're followed!"

Followed! and in that wild land of forest and stream? Trailed! and at the dead of night, and lost in the woodland of mystery and death?

Tarsus Nightwell could not speak.

The sound of the Ausable seemed to die out in an instant, and the stillness of the grave to him swooped silently down like a spectral eagle.

"Followed it is," repeated Simon. "Can't ye hear, Tarsus? Thar!"

The superstitious hunter did hear a footstep among the young leaves which their own feet had lately passed.

It sounded like the tread of some animal trotting leisurely along, like a tired dog on the scent.

When he found his tongue he cocked his rifle and said:

"A wolf, mayhap, Simon. It's got the trot of that beast."

"But it's no wolf! I've been listenin' to it fur miles. When we stop it stops. Thar! ye can't hear it now."

"What do ye think it is?"

If Simon had seen his companion's face he would have started back with a cry of horror.

It was hideous in its ghastliness, for Tarsus Nightwell had been thinking how terrible it would be to be followed by some vengeful enemy in that land of terrors.

"What do I think it is?" said Simon Oldfoot. "It isn't a wolf, that's sartin; nor a bear. It's a man."

"Injun?"

"I don't know, because I can't see 'im."

"Now let's go on ag'in till I kin get the hang of the step," said Nightwell. "I'll take the rear. Now push on."

The journey was resumed, with Simon in the van.

Tarsus Nightwell kept his ears strained to catch any sounds that might follow them.

He heard the footstep which had attracted Simon. It followed them in that peculiar dog-trot of the Indian; it was monotonous, never varying nor stopping, save when the giants stopped to listen.

It worked Tarsus Nightwell into a passion of madness. He drew his knife, and crouched in the path. Simon, not missing him for the roar of the Ausable, went on.

Panther-like, the giant waited for the mysterious trailer. It continued to approach, and in the very path which the hunters had made in the leaves.

Nightwell saw it not, but marked its approach by the footsteps. Slowly he drew the long knife back and held his breath.

The trailer was before him—a figure darker than the ghostly hemlocks around.

The giant saw for a moment, and then, throwing his body, tiger-like, forward, struck with all his might.

But nothing opposed his knife, and the hunter went headlong across the trail to fall into a clump of bushes, from whose recesses he frightened a coyote with a loud cry.

For one moment he lay there, when, springing to his feet, he dashed through the forest, calling lustily for Simon Oldfoot.

That worthy heard the call and halted, for the first time to discover that Nightwell was not at his heels.

"By the jumpin' jingo! the fool went back to fight it!" he said. "He's runnin' as if the old Zach war at his heels."

Like a wild deer the giant was pushing

through the Adirondack woods, breaking the young bushes down, and startling more than one animal from its covert.

He would have rushed past Simon, if that individual had not checked him with his great hand.

"You'd run spang into the Ausable!" Simon said, harshly. "Thar isn't a sleepin' thing in these woods now—my head on thet! What hev ye seen?"

"Don't ask me, Simon; it war nothin' thet hes blood. I struck with all my might, an', by the holy stars! I fell right through it! Come, Simon, let's git out of this devil-land. It war a ghost—thin, an' cold as the air—fur my blood froze as I went through it."

Tarsus Nightwell, the giant, was the incarnation of fright, and Simon Oldfoot caught the disease.

He felt the chill of terror in his heart, and as he listened, not to the natural unterrifying roar of the river, but to the sepulchral drip, drip of the water through the trees, he became incapable of flight.

And, added to other sounds, came that awful trot of the mysterious trailer.

Ghost it certainly was, for Tarsus Nightwell had fallen headlong through it!

CHAPTER II.

PINEY PAUL AND NOKOMIS.

NOT trotting; but walking rapidly through the Adirondack woods was the "ghost" which had frightened the two men, who would have attacked an entire Indian village or stood their ground against a pack of mountain wolves.

Of course it was not a specter, but a person composed, like the giants, of flesh, blood, bone and sinew!

The easy swinging motion of the body and the elastic step were the causes of that gait, so like the well known dog-trot.

It was the figure of a boy that glided shadow-like under the rain-burdened branches of the trees—a boy clad in wild and fantastic garb of buck-skin, with a cap of fur, and moccasins of elegant workmanship. The contour of face and figure was remarkably handsome, and the youth still in his sixteenth year, though strong and agile for one so young, would at any time attract attention.

And then he was a character in those dark tarns of the Adirondacks; he knew the trails that led to Whiteface's snowy crest, as his paddles knew the sleeping depths of Tupper Lake.

He carried a light rifle at a trail in his right hand. It was his only visible weapon; but he had others as the reader shall see.

He wore in his fur cap a sprig of pine which looked very like a plume, and at his side hung what appeared to be an oversized powder-horn, but which was in reality a bugle.

Thus equipped the "ghost" flitted through the forest while the two giants listened to his steps with the feelings that fill the captive's heart when he hears the headsman's feet coming down the corridor of stone.

But all at once the boy stopped and listened. There were sounds in the woods ahead, besides those made by the Ausable.

The giants had found their feet and were running again.

He listened with a smile on his well-formed face, but did not pursue.

Tarsus Nightwell and his companion might harbor their breath, for the footsteps so suggestive of doom were not pattering at their heels.

The boy did not pause till the sound of flying feet were lost, seemingly among the waves of the stormy stream.

Then a light laugh, though a strange one, rippled over his lips. It seemed out of place there at that hour.

"Back to the lodge!" he said, as if addressing a command to a party of Indian braves. "The bad men of the city send their tools after the lost girl. There are many trails among the mountains now, and they will be bloody if the fiends try to pierce the hiding-place of the one we all seek. Piney Paul fears not the hand of the giants. He saw them in the woods to-day, and they ran from him with all their speed."

There was the braggadocio of the boy in all his tones; but he uttered his words with determination.

"Trails in the mountains and along the streams!" he continued, elevating his voice.

"Trails to old Whiteface's top, and beneath Racket's waters! Trails among the pines, and trails to the wigwam of the Indian! Everywhere trails, and for one purpose. They come for that. Gold sent them here, and there are others who hunt for gold. Back to the hidden lodge now! They know not where they run;

but I know every trail in these mountains. Every trail? No! There is one which even I do not know!"

The last sentence was spoken with much evident chagrin. The boy was moving toward the Ausable as the last words fell from his lips.

A short walk brought him to the river, flowing through one of the picturesque gorges of the Adirondack country. The pines on each bank, bending one toward the other, almost met above the center of the stream, from which, in many places, they excluded even the fair daylight.

The boy reached the river at a point that called forth an exclamation of joy.

Securing his rifle to his back by means of a strap which had been coiled at his belt, he caught the slender trunk of a pine that venturesomely grew at the very edge of the precipice, and lowered himself into the chasm.

But it was not his intention to dash himself to destruction amid the whirlpool of waters that hissed several hundred feet below.

His feet struck a network of vines that clung to the rocks, and for a moment he was lost to the view of the few stars which, at that point, threw their beams into the gorge. But the motion imparted to the strong creepers—a motion which snake-like crept downward toward the river—told that he was descending.

At last, by the aid of this natural stairway, the forest sprite reached the bottom, where the roar of the Ausable was almost deafening. The rocks at his feet were spray-washed and slippery, and the spectacle which the river possessed in the daytime was hidden in the darkness at night.

Hurrying along over the rocks with the sure steps of a person reared in these awful solitudes, the youth reached a place which, in daylight, would have revealed an opening like the forbidding mouth of a cavern.

This he entered like one in authority, there, and soon a singular apartment was revealed by a fire that blazed on a stone floor.

Then the wood ghost stood revealed in the mellow light of a fine fire, and his features were brought into view.

Around him were walls bare, but not monotonous.

Some hand had covered them with singular pictures drawn with various colored stones, with bows and arrows and the heads of the animals and fowls then found in the Adirondack country. Further up than the tallest man could reach those grotesque pictures adorned the light stones, and the ceiling, fifty feet above the fire, was covered by the monster head of a demon flanked by bat-like wings, a picture truly hideous and frightening in its aspect.

The majority of the drawings bordered on the grotesque and horrible; but there was one which was so suggestive of happy days and home, that it deserves more than a passing notice.

It represented a cottage planted as if by fairy hands upon the side of a hill.

To the left ran a little stream rustically bridged, and very beautiful. Beneath the great tree that grew before the cottage and drooped protectingly over its eaves, several children were playing.

The picture was life-like though done in "keel," and the colors were not dull and dead; the magic of varnish and oil seemed to have been imparted to them.

If the wall had been decorated by the hand of the sole occupant of the cavern there was genius encompassed by its walls. But how did he paint the ceiling? and why cover it with that terrible monster whose presence seemed a spirit of evil brooding over all?

Within the cavern, strange to say, the wild song of the Ausable was scarcely distinguishable. The cavern was above the level of the stream; the corridor had led gradually up until it was reached.

No articles of furniture filled the subterranean abode.

A couch of skins directly beneath the drawing of rural peace and simplicity was the only object that suggested repose. Besides several guns and a half-concealed provision chest, it was the only thing there.

The boy at once seemed at home in this strange place. He almost tossed his gun into one corner, and flung his cap, pine plume and all, upon the couch.

"Piney Paul is at home!" he said, in a rich voice, and a tone of undisguised joy. "His lodge is undisturbed, ha! ha! They find it not; the guard keeps ward and watch over it," and he glanced at the grinning face overhead. "The long trail begins now. They are here from the city to the south, and others will come. The

Indians work for gold. They seek the same trail that Piney Paul has sought so long. Where is Nokomis? He said he would be here to-night. Where is the last chief of the mountain Upas?"

In answer to the question there was the short growl of a wolf-dog.

Piney Paul turned quickly at the sound, and confronted a strongly-built Indian naked to the waist. He wore no plume, but his hair was long and lay on his massive shoulders.

Between his legs a vicious-looking dog was showing his teeth, as he snarled at the boy.

"Nokomis!" cried Piney Paul, starting toward the Indian; "they are here! He has sent them from the city to find and to slay!"

"Nokomis saw them in the forest!" was the reply. "He came to tell the pine hunter that they cannot trail together."

The boy started at the Upas's words, and his eyes flashed.

"I know his gold will be far-reaching. It will, by foul means, buy the Indian over to him; but it cannot buy Nokomis, the last of his race!"

For a moment the Indian was silent. The workings of his countenance told that the youth's speech had affected him. A mental battle between good and evil was going on in his mind.

"Nokomis has said!" he said firmly, avoiding the boy's gaze.

"His gold has corrupted even you, then?"

Piney Paul cried, drawing his figure to its full height, as, with flashing eyes, he started forward until he found himself right before the red-skin.

"Hear me, Nokomis, the last of his race, and a traitor to the white man's gold! They may trail, and you may trail, but I swear that you shall never find. I will stand between his accursed money and the hidden lodge. The trails of these mountains shall yet be sprinkled with blood! You have sold yourself. I drive you from my lodge as I would drive the dog which would steal my breakfast. I will watch you, mean Indian traitor! Not a word out of your lying mouth! Go! dog and all! But first, look up and see the evil spirit that smiles upon the league you have formed with the devils of city and forest."

The youth's finger pointed overhead, and the Indian's eyes followed it.

For one brief moment he looked up. In that short space of time his eyes took in the great devilish face and wings that covered the ceiling, and, with a shriek of terror, he turned on his heel and fled from the cavern.

"Fool was I to trust that Indian!" Piney Paul said. "He has sold himself to Cecil Crane's schemes, and my cave secret will follow him. But I will stand alone. By the God who loves the flower of the hidden lodge! I will baffle them. I was driven to these solitudes, and I will show them that there is a tiger in the fastnesses of this devil-land more cunning and relentless than the terror of the jungles. Didn't I know that they would come some day to hunt for the hidden lodge? Will he come himself? No! he dare not invade these mountains where lurks for him the only person who wants his blood. Stay back, Cecil Crane! don't come here!"

CHAPTER III.

THE INTERRUPTED CONFERENCE.

"THAT'S not the sign of a boat hereabouts, an' we've skarted the whole island. Nokomis an' Red Loon will not stay away much longer. What d'ye say to landin' hyar, anyhow?"

"Yes, land here, Tarsus. We have not been observed, I am sure."

"Obsarved? of course not. It war quite dark when we left the shore, an' the risin' moon will not betray us now. This island is a place of my own pickin', Mr. Crane. Simon hyar hadn't a word to say in the matter. They call it Deer Island—the Injuns do—but they don't know why. Nokomis, who knows every foot of the surface, says he never seed a deer hyar. Guess they called it that because a deer never got hyar."

The man who smiled faintly at the hunter's last remark was a person of two and thirty, with snaky eyes, and a cold, money-cunning face. He was fashionably dressed to be a *habitué* of the Adirondacks; there were rings of much value on his white hands, and a diamond pin on his bosom.

He sat in the stern of a long canoe, which, besides himself, carried the two hunters, Tarsus Nightwell and Simon Oldfoot.

Before the craft loomed the form of an island roughened with trees and deep indentations of coast—one of the picturesque spots of land that beautify the watery breast of Lake Tupper.

The moon, deserting a bank of clouds, threw her mellow light upon the *voyageurs*; but they soon passed beyond it into the shadows, and leaped ashore.

"They were to meet us at a certain place, I suppose," the cityfied man said, half questioning-ly.

"Of course," answered Simon. "We've been hyar afore an' kin find the place. Wonderful country, this."

"Nature is wild here," was the reply.

"An' the people, too!"

"The Indians, you mean?"

"Everybody! Bless you, Mr. Crane, if you'd seen what Tarsus an' me hev seen since we've come into this country, you wouldn't be hyar to-night to meet two red-skins on Deer Island."

"Perhaps not; but I do not intend turning back until my work is accomplished," the city man said with firmness. "I may be risking my life, but I will go on. There is no turning back till my work is done, I care not what obstacles lie in my way. I came here for business!"

There was no reply; but the two giants exchanged looks that were significant.

The boat was moored to the body of a tree which the violence of the mountain gales had hurled into the water, and the trio pushed into the interior of the island.

"They're thar," said Nightwell, suddenly throwing his voice over his shoulder at his followers, and a minute later five dark human figures stood amid the shadows that nestled on the center of the island.

"This is our master!" said Nightwell to the two Indian figures, waving his hand as he spoke toward Cecil Crane. "This is the white man with the gold. He will tell our red brethren what he wants. Nokomis and Red Loon must know that he never lies!"

Without waiting for Nightwell to finish the introductory remarks, Cecil Crane extended his hands, which were taken by the stranger with expressive "ughs" and "good brothers."

"I came from the great city to see you," Cecil Crane said, as the Indians drew their figures to majestic height, and with arms folded upon brawny chests, waited for him to speak. "Long ago some evil hand stole a white child from the arms of its mother, and it was carried to this country. Somewhere that child is still hidden, watched by the person who stole it. That was seventeen years ago. We have heard that she has been seen in these mountains and we have hunted for her; but all trails have ended suddenly, as if the child had stepped into the water of this lake. I came to tell my red brethren that if they find the trail and bring the white child to me, I will load them down with gold, and with fine goods from the great city of my people. My friends are here. They are skillful hunters; they will trail with Red Loon and Nokomis."

Cecil Crane finished, and stepping back, awaited a reply.

The Indian called Red Loon, a lithe fellow, but possessed of much strength, broke the silence.

"Red Loon will trail the child-stealer for his pale brother!" he said. "He must be well paid, for does not the chief take his life in his hands? There is one who will follow Red Loon. He will tear the white child from the Indian's arms and send a bullet to his heart. The canoe boy is a tiger."

Cecil Crane looked at his white companion.

"Whom does he mean?" he asked.

"I'll tell ye arter 'while. Don't let the boy bother you. We're five; he's one. Odds enough, Simon, eh?"

"Odds enough, Mr. Crane," said Oldfoot. "Tell Red Loon that you'll give him all he wants."

The last sentence, couched in a whisper, fell upon the white man's ears alone, and he assured the caviling Indian that his trail should be plentifully sprinkled with gold coin.

The Indian's eyes flashed greedily.

"It is enough!" said Red Loon. "We will trail the man with the white girl. The woods and rivers of this land are as open ground to Red Loon and Nokomis. Will my white brother go back?"

"No!" said Cecil Crane, quickly. "Without the girl I will never return."

"Then you never go back!"

If a thunderbolt had dropped at the feet of the five the thrilling sentence would not have startled them less.

The voice came from the impenetrable gloom of the pine shadows, and every face was instantly turned toward them.

Cecil Crane's was white; a nameless terror had taken possession of it.

"Lead back your tools and get yourself from this domain!" cried the same stern voice from the shadows. "The girl whom you seek shall never fall into your hands. Between her and you stand death in more forms than one. It is decreed in heaven that your gold shall never drag her from the hidden lodge. Leave this country, Cecil Crane!"

The man to whom these words were addressed listened like a criminal at the bar to his death sentence, and he staggered against Simon Oldfoot with a sound—half-curse, half-cry.

"It's a lie!" he cried, recovering himself impulsively and darting forward. "I care not if all the devils of these solitudes league against me. No voice can drive me hence. Tarsus, Simon, what are you doing? You know this island. Follow the villain and bring him to me!"

But the giants did not move, and the Indians were motionless, too.

"Foller a shadder or a ghost?" said Nightwell, with the old leer of fright in his eyes which a fortnight previous had glittered there.

"We'll hunt the gal fur ye, an' all that; but we wouldn't foller the thing what spoke fur all the gold in yer chests."

"Pish!" flashed Crane, derisively, and with anger. "To perdition with your ghosts! Red Loon and Nokomis, are you, too, afraid? You know this land. Follow the liar out there in the gloom. Let him not escape. Here! my riches for his accursed scalp!"

Cecil Crane tore the gold chain from his neck, and thrust it with the magnificent watch attached to it into Red Loon's hand.

"Red Loon is brave!" said the Indian, as he thrust the costly gift aside. "He will hunt the pale girl; but he stands here like a tall pine when the spirit speaks."

"Cowards!" cried the baffled adventurer, his face changing from its pallor to the lividness of rage. "I am not afraid to face the liar. All theimps of this imp-land cannot frighten me."

With a suddenness that no one could meet, he tore the rifle from Nightwell's gripe and bounded forward.

But the next instant a hand seized his collar, and lifted him bodily from the ground.

It was the hand of Simon Oldfoot.

"You're crazy," said the giant. "We'll sarcumvent that feller out thar some time or other. The advantage is all his'n now. We knows our business."

Cecil Crane was forced to listen, firmly held as he was in the vise-like grasp of Oldfoot.

"The trail to the hidden lodge will be bloody!" came the voice from the darkness.

"The crimes of the past shall be avenged. The eagles of the Adirondacks and the wolves will glare at the bones of Cecil Crane and his followers."

Simon Oldfoot released his employer and saw him brace his courage up.

"I'll prove it all a lie!" he cried. "I am not afraid of you! The eagles and the wolves shall behold your carcass, and the coyotes shall quarrel over it. I am here, and here I stay until I accomplish my purpose! Beware, sir boaster! I have gold enough to hire every Indian in these fastnesses to trail you. I will make each one a blood-hound."

The only answer was a wild, derisive laugh, which seemed to set the leaves in motion as it rippled through them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADES OF DEATH.

HALF an hour later the island on the bosom of Lake Tupper—called then by an Indian name, as difficult of pronunciation as the cognomen of Maine's rivers—was deserted by humanity.

The moon came up slowly and bathed the sleeping water and the tips of the stately pines in a shower of silvery light.

Two boats were disappearing in the shadows that hugged the mainland. They contained Cecil Crane and his party, glad, no doubt, to escape from Deer Island with their precious lives.

In an opposite direction, an object like a small canoe was moving from the island, cutting the water into shining ripples, but making no noise to disturb the listening ear of nature.

The figure that occupied the middle of the barque was boyish in proportions. It was Piney Paul's.

He guided the boat toward a dark island-like object, which might have been visible to keen eyes from Deer Island. It lay some distance north of the place of the interrupted conference, and was not so large as it, by several acres.

When the boat touched the most adventuresome shadows of the trees, the boy lifted the

bugle to his lips and blew a blast that made the distant mountains ring with delightful echoes. He blew but once, when the bugle fell at his side, and he rested on his oars at the edge of the shade.

For several moments there was no response, and the boy, manifesting fretful impatience, was lifting the bugle again, when a sound, like the plunge of some large animal into the water, caused him to desist.

"I am heard!" he said with satisfaction, as he bent forward to catch sight of the object that was approaching through the water.

Presently the ripples sent forth by the swimmer eddied to his boat, and then a dark shaggy head was lifted from the lake, and two paws, drenched, but large and powerful, rested on the gunwale.

Two paws, not hands, for the swimmer was a monster dog!

"So you heard me, Death?" the boy said, patting the dog familiarly on the head. "How is the master to-night, and the mistress, too? Do you want to rest before going back to tell them that I am alone? No! no! Your limbs are strong, and I am impatient. Go back now!"

As the last words fell from Piney Paul's lips, he thrust a curiously-shaped stick between the dog's jaws, and, with a look half human, the paws left the boat and disappeared.

"I don't know whether I am doing right in trusting them," the boy said, watching the dog's head as it moved toward the island. "I am match enough for Cecil Crane and his hirelings. But the old hermit knows something about my life hunt, and without that knowledge I may never succeed. Let him tell me the secret, and I'll snip my fingers at the toes of the Adirondacks."

A few minutes after the dog's departure, a singular cry came from the shadows of the island, and the canoe instantly shot forward again.

Springing from the barque the boy alighted on *terra firma*, and started into the interior of the island.

A few steps sufficed to bring him to a strange habitation built of pine boughs. It was scarcely large enough to comfortably accommodate a single person, however few his wants, and resembled the lair-like abode of some barbarian.

This habitation was revealed by a fire that blazed at the hovel-like door, and showed the being who stood there waiting to receive his visitor.

In appearance the ogre of the island tallied exactly with his surroundings. He was old, misshapen and dwarfish. His skin looked like burned parchment, or the skin of a mummy, lifeless, dark and shriveled. Two little eyes literally burned in his head, and the lips, when parted, displayed two rows of wolfish-like fangs. Half clad, with powerful chest hideously tattooed as if to frighten the timid, the ogre of the island confronted Piney Paul.

Place two bat-like wings at his shoulders, and the original of the ogreish portrait in the cave would appear.

Standing beside this imp of the Adirondacks was the dog which had answered Piney Paul's signal—a brute of unusual proportions, ferocious in aspect; a Nero of his species.

The eyes of the ogre danced like serpent orbs when they fell upon the boy advancing fearlessly into the light of the fire.

"I am here!" Piney Paul said, halting at a respectful distance from the fiend of the island. "You have promised to tell me to-night. There are bad men on the trail. One man's gold has hired the Indian chiefs to hunt the hidden girl. They must not find! Tell me, and in return you shall know where the Englishman hid the gold, away back when England and America fought one another."

The ogre's eyes flashed with greed, showing that into his barbarous heart the love of gold had penetrated.

He came forward stealthily like the panther, with his eyes fixed beast-like upon the boy.

"I don't like those eyes; they may mean mischief!" thought Piney Paul, involuntarily retreating a step.

"Tell me, Ocotoc," he said. "Be as good as your word. Where is the lost lodge of the Adirondacks?"

The ogre did not reply. His fingers played nervously on the short club which he held in his right hand.

The dog followed him, almost scraping the ground with his belly in the cougar-like crawl.

"There!" cried Piney Paul, suddenly, thoroughly satisfied that there was evil in the actions of the twain before him. "You are near enough, Ocotoc. If you will break your word,

I swear that you will never know where the mad Englishman hid his gold and jewels. Never, so help me angels!"

The boy was aroused; his eyes flashed with indignation and anger, and he raised the rifle menacingly.

But ten feet intervened between him and the two savages—the ogre and his tigerish dog.

He was a goodly distance from the boat, and away from the fire the path was beset with many unseen obstacles.

"You have lied!" he flung at the Indian.

"Again and again I have come here but to be put off. I believe you do not know anything about the hidden girl. If you do, why do you repeatedly break your oath-bound promise? I will never come here again."

The dwarf, almost crouching at the boy's very feet, replied with a laugh, devilish in sound, and the dog ground his teeth.

"The solitary boy disbelieves Ocotoc," he said, speaking for the first time and in a squeakish tone. "He would not tell him where the yellow pebbles are if Ocotoc showed him the trail to the girl."

"Try me!" cried Piney Paul, eagerly. "Try me, if you dare!"

"Then tell Ocotoc first, and the trail will be made plain."

"No," said the boy. "I was to give my secret for yours—I was to have yours first—that was the bargain."

The Indian gritted his fangs and looked at the dog, who caught his glance and then fastened his eyes upon the boy.

"Pelosee," he said.

The next moment there sprang from the door of the hovel a being so striking in contrast to the ogre that Piney Paul uttered an exclamation of astonishment and started back.

The new-comer upon the scene was an Indian girl, tall, beautiful and symmetrical of limb. There was grace in her movements, and but for the mad flashings of her deep-set eyes of darkness, she might have been taken for the angel of the isle.

The eyes of the astonished boy became riveted upon the fascinating enchantress. They did not return to Ocotoc and Death, until his very life hung by a thread as slender as the spider's spinning.

Pelosee, as she was called, came forward, straight toward Piney Paul, watched by the ogre and his dog.

"Behold the lost girl!" said Ocotoc, suddenly waving his hand toward the siren. "She stands before the mountain boy. Ocotoc's secret lies at his feet. Now, where is the Englishman's gold?"

"What! that girl the inmate of the hidden lodge?" cried the mountain youth. "I did not come here to be blindly hoodwinked. Do you think I am a fool? That girl's skin is red; she is an Indian. I know she is not Cicely!"

The forest girl who had halted before Piney Paul came forward again.

The boy retreated, for she seemed transformed into a veritable tigress.

"Now!" cried Ocotoc, springing erect. "He believes it not. Pelosee! Death!"

Though warned by the ogre's signal, Piney Paul's hasty preparations for defense were quickly dashed aside.

Simultaneously the maiden and the dog sprang upon him!

He grappled with the latter, and retreating fought to keep the sharp teeth from his throat.

It was a combat that seemed capable of but one result. The dog, held by the boy, whose strength appeared prodigious, tried to get at his throat, while the red tigress, club in hand, tried to beat him into insensibility. But her task was not an easy one, for the combatants, tripped unexpectedly, were on the ground, and a blow aimed at Piney Paul might brain the dog.

All at once Ocotoc with a cry called the girl off, and the two watched the fight on the ground.

It was now a test of strength, for without weapons of any kind at his command—his rifle having been wrenched from his grasp by Pelosee at the commencement of the attack—the boy was forced to combat with the arms which nature had given him.

Fretting like a wild animal, eager to participate in the battle, the island girl was, with difficulty, restrained by Ocotoc. Her eyes flashed fire; her hands clutched nervously at her side, and her bosom heaved with the excitement of wild fight.

The two antagonists were almost equally matched. The dog Death, powerful as he was, found a foe worthy of his metal in the little hermit of the Adirondacks.

With one hand at the monster's shaggy throat

and the other striking furious blows at his eyes, Piney Paul fought with the courage of a Turk. The dog began to succumb at last. The gripe on his throat tightened like a vise.

At length Piney Paul, with a sudden effort, threw him off and sprang to his feet.

His victory was greeted with cries of rage, and he suddenly found himself confronted by Ocotoc and the beautiful tigress, Pelosee.

The dog, placed *hors du combat*, was lying at the ogre's feet, rolling his eyes and gasping for breath. The choking and the blows in the side had well-nigh finished him.

Piney Paul was desperate!

With a wild exclamation of defiance, he sprang for his rifle, which, as he touched it, was snatched up by Pelosee. But the boy with a quick movement wrenched it from her grasp and hurled it above his head.

The mad siren did not retreat from the threatened blow. She sprang upon him with the bound of the jungle king, uttering a half-brutish cry, and the mountain boy struck with all his might.

But a stout pine limb arrested the blow, which otherwise would have crushed the vixen's skull, and the rifle, shivered at the lock, fell from his hands!

Piney Paul uttered a cry of horror, and before he could recover, he found himself in the arms of the red giantess.

She held him out to the hideous Ocotoc in triumph, and her laugh rung in the boy's ears like the knell of doom.

CHAPTER V.

THE PIT OF WOLVES.

THE situation of the Adirondack hermit was now critical in the extreme.

Weakened by his long struggle with Death, the dog, he was as a child in the sinewy arms of Pelosee.

The witch of the island held him out at arms' length until Ocotoc had glutted his curiosity upon him. Piney Paul did not resist; he looked into the eyes of his captor and saw no gleam of mercy there. If Pelosee was Ocotoc's child, she had inherited the nature of her sire.

"Will the mountain boy tell where the Englishman's yellow rocks are now?" cried the satyr, coming forward with that avaricious yearning of the miser shooting from his snaky eyes. "He is a caught bird, and Pelosee will bloody the feathers on his throat if he tells not."

The threat found confirmation in the eyes of the witch. The twain understood one another perfectly.

"Do you think I would tell you, when you would say I lied, and kill me anyhow!" the little hermit said to the Indian. "I am not the fool for whom you take me—not by a long shot! Stars and garters! I don't give secrets away. Where is the lost white girl—where is the hidden lodge? Tell me that, and then ask about the gold!"

The boy seemed to forget that he was in the power of the spirits of the island.

The long trail of his life rose paramount to death in that perilous hour. He thought only of discovering that secret which the wild Adirondacks kept studiously hidden somewhere in their gloomy recesses—a secret for which he had buried himself from civilization, trailing the Indian, the wolf, and the bear, with the hope of solving it, and righting a monstrous wrong.

For a brief moment Ocotoc did not reply to the boy's demand, which, considering his situation, smacked strongly of the ludicrous.

Piney Paul saw the dry skin darken, and the wrinkles of the brow contract. A thunder-cloud seemed to lower itself upon the Indian's face; the flashing of his eyes were the arrows of lightning that constantly cleaved the gloom.

"There is a place where the mountain wild-cat will tell!" he said mysteriously and with rancor. "Ocotoc goes not there, for his limbs are weak, and he might fall. Pelosee will take the boy thither, and he shall tell her where the gold is—or be left alone!"

The words "be left alone" seemed indicative of some terrible doom.

Pelosee started forward in the direction indicated by the Indian's finger, and Piney Paul found himself borne from the spot by his captor.

"If I live to leave this infernal island alive, you'll pay for this night's work!" he cried over his shoulder at the dwarf, whose look told how his heart was beating with fiendish delight. "Snakes and spirits! I want to live just to treat you as you deserve. There'll soon be no Ocotoc, if I get out o' this!"

The laugh of a fiend followed him, and Piney Paul clenched his teeth.

Though his feet touched the ground he took but few steps in the natural gait. One of Pelosee's hands gripped his arm like a shackle, and the fingers seemed to encircle the very bone itself. He could not have broken from that fetter of flesh, any more than he could have torn himself from the rack of Spanish torture.

Pelosee was not the only guard, for there trotted at his heels the dog, his late antagonist, somewhat recovered, and ready to rend him to pieces at the bidding of the island witch.

After awhile the party began to ascend the side of an acclivity. Pelosee pushed her way through the small brush that fringed the foot of the rise, and entered the line of trees.

Piney Paul looked up and saw the moonlight far above him.

He was perplexed by the sight, for a moment; but when he recollected that many of the islands of the Adirondack lakes contained single peaks of startling height, he ceased to wonder. Deer Island boasted of several mountainous elevations which were visible from a great distance. Why should not the ogre's land, though much smaller, contain at least one such?

No words were exchanged until Pelosee paused as if to make sure of her bearings.

"The Indian girl is lost," Piney Paul said, noting her perplexed cast of countenance. "She lives on the island. Nobody ought to get lost at home!"

"Pelosee is not lost," was the reply. "The rain has fallen on the narrow path. Pelosee and Ocotoc do not come up here often!"

The Indian girl had halted in the moonlight, and Piney Paul took a good look at her features. When she had first leaped from the piney hut at Ocotoc's command, she appeared a vision of beauty, and the boy again noted that his first glance had not deceived him.

The face was oval and faultless to the minutest particular. The dark hair of the Indian maiden belonged to Pelosee in all its loveliness and wealth. It fell undressed to her glossy shoulders, and, falling over them, increased the romance of her appearance. Her dress, a beaded saccie, reaching to the knees, was a very marvel of backwoods ingenuity, and the leggings of dressed buck-skin ended at the top of handsome moccasins.

While Piney Paul was engaged in studying his captor, she moved on again, and the ascent of the mountain became somewhat tiresome. But Pelosee still clutched the boy's arm, and helped him over the uneven ground with much apparent ease.

"Is that man down there your father?" Piney Paul suddenly said, looking up into the girl's face. "It doesn't appear to me that he can be. You're downright good-looking, and live in the wrong company. By the great bear! I would say that you were born a long way from that little old devil below us."

"Hush!" cried Pelosee, her gripe tightening till the little hermit bit his lips in pain. "Pelosee wasn't born at all. She came in a storm to the island, and Ocotoc is the child of the Great Spirit."

"Gimminy and crickets!" cried Piney Paul. "I'd rather be born right than come to such a home in a storm, leastwise in the kind o' storms that sometimes thunder through these mountains. So Ocotoc is one of God's children, eh? I expect I'm one of the few people on earth who don't believe that. But it was a pretty storm what fetched you here, Pelosee—a little mountain shower when the sun was shining."

The Indian witch did not reply to the boy's flattery, but gave him a look of more feeling than she had yet bestowed, and kept on.

"Do you know anything about the hidden girl?" Piney Paul asked. "Tell me, Pelosee, and I will never forget you."

The answer was a rude jerk. "The mountain boy will soon forget Pelosee," were the accompanying words. "She knows where the white flower grows in the lost lodge; but her lips are shut."

The boy darted her a scrutinizing look. There was honesty in her demeanor, candor in her tone.

"Shut, are they?" he cried, stopping and forcing her to pause. "Won't gold open them? Tell me, Pelosee, and all the gold of the Englishman shall be yours. Tell me and let me go, and I'll load you down with the yellow dirt."

"No! Pelosee don't want the yellow dirt. But he will tell her where it is before she lets him go."

"Without you telling me about the hidden girl? No!"

"Pelosee will see."

The trio were going up the side of the mountain in the moonlight.

Piney Paul noticed that the air got rarer as they advanced, and that the mountain sides were becoming rocky and rough, with chasms here and there, and holes like volcanic craters.

He had clambered to the top of Whiteface, and from thence surveyed the rough landscape of the Adirondacks; but he believed that he was ascending a peak which, if not so elevated, was grander than that king of mountains.

All at once Pelosee stopped and spoke to Death.

The dog, as if understanding her, set up a peculiar barking, which was immediately answered by the distinct howls of wolves which seemed to emanate from the bowels of the earth, but at a point still above them.

"Wolves, by hokey!" the mountain hermit involuntarily exclaimed. "They don't get this far up on the mainland mountains."

"They stay here!" Pelosee answered, with mysterious significance. "The little wood-cat will see."

A few steps further on brought the trio to one of the numerous hollows or basins which we have casually mentioned. It was almost square, and seemed some dark cellar formed by the hands of mountain imps.

From its depths came a series of wolfish howls that rivalled Bedlam.

Piney Paul heard the ravenous animals fighting each other, and caught glimpses of brute figures in furious combat.

The moonlight fell upon one of the walls of the basin, and its silver, glancing therefrom, but vaguely revealed the occupants of the natural cage.

Ocotoc caught the wild dogs when the snow covered them in the mountains," Pelosee said, suddenly answering Piney Paul's mental question of "how came the wolves there?" "Pelosee feeds them when she likes; but for three nights they have not tasted meat."

Did the boy shudder?

If he did not, nothing could appall him!

"I guess I see through the matter," he said, looking up into the girl's face, now calm and not stern. "I'm to go down among them if I don't tell you about the gold."

"Thus says Ocotoc, the child of the Great Spirit."

"Or somebody else's devil!" said Piney Paul, madly. "See here, Pelosee, what have you got against me? Must you kill because he says 'kill? Gimminy and crickets! you might want help somewhere some o' these days. Besides, the white girl is poor; she is hunted by bad men; she is your sister, Pelosee, and mine, too."

The girl's eyes softened and fell upon the mountain boy.

"Pelosee has no sister," she said. "The mountain cat wants to make her his squaw."

"You're getting jealous. It's all out o' place here. Pelosee, there is a land far from this island where there is an empty lodge. We would be happy there. No Ocotoc, no little hut of pine boughs."

The girl was silent.

"I would come back," said the boy, continuing quickly. "Go and tell Ocotoc that I was thrown to the wolves. He will believe."

"But the dog would say that Pelosee comes back with a forked tongue," said the Indian, hesitating.

Piney Paul looked at his old enemy, the dog. The animal was lying on the ground with his head over the rim of the basin, snarling at his wilder brethren, the wolves.

"He will never tell!" the boy cried. "You can tell Ocotoc that he fell in trying to bite me. There!"

The next moment there was a loud cry of canine terror, and Death went headlong into the pit, sent to his doom by the young imp's foot.

Pelosee uttered an exclamation of horror, and Piney Paul found himself lifted from the ground.

"The Mountain Cat must follow the dog! But he shall have a knife to fight the wolves with. Pelosee was going to let him hunt the hidden girl; but now—now he must go down to the wolves—down to the mad mountain dogs!"

Piney Paul caught the glitter of a knife as it was thrust into his belt, and the next instant he was pushed over the edge of the basin.

For one moment, awful and brief, Pelosee held him in mid-air, and then he fell down—down among the wolves fighting over the quivering body of the dog Death!

CHAPTER VI.

THE MUTINY.

DAYLIGHT, when it broke, found Cecil Crane and his followers pushing through a rough forest of pine and hemlock.

The party was guided by Red Loon, in whose tracks Nokomis the Upas trod with the noiseless tread of the panther.

By and by the guide turned abruptly aside, and the ascent of a mountain began.

Slowly up the steep sides the party toiled, and when the peak had been scaled, a view, unequalled in grandeur, burst upon their vision.

The Adirondack country, in its primitive wilderness, lay around them, its sheets of land-locked waters, its immense forests and towering elevations.

While the scene called forth exclamations of surprise and wonder from the whites, the two Indians did not appear in the least affected. To them the sight was commonplace; they had witnessed it so often that no wonder clung to it.

"Somewhere yonder is the hidden lodge," Red Loon said, with a circling sweep of his scarlet hand, as he turned to Cecil Crane. "The trails are long; they are dark; they lead to death!"

A slight pallor overspread the hunter's face.

"I am prepared for anything!" he said with an effort. "Do not seek to discourage me with an enumeration of the difficulties that will beset us. Let us put a truce to such things and plunge into the work at once."

The Indians exchanged glances, and Nokomis nodded.

"Come!" he said, turning to Crane. "There is something for the white man to see."

The tone in which the chief uttered his words, and the look that accompanied them, startled Tarsus Nightwell.

"Hold on, thar!" he cried, seizing the Upas as he was about to turn away. "I don't want to see everything in these infernal mountains. I didn't come hyar to hunt up every ghost-hole; but to find the lost gal. Blame me! if I go a step, fur I know that you're goin' to show up something awful. Take Mr. Crane with ye. I kin hunt better if I don't see sartin things, perhaps."

Crane turned upon the giant with a look of mingled scorn and rage.

"I didn't think you were so superstitious!" he said, scarcely able to bridle his ire. "Get out of that or we will never find our prey."

"See hyar, Mr. Crane, I'm a man, I am!" was the retort. "By the jumpin' jingo! I'll do as I please; go whar I want to, an' stop when an' whar I see fit. You'll wish yerself back in the city afore you're a week in this devil-land. Me an' Simon arn't afraid of all the wolves an' Injuns in creation, but when you buck us ag'in' spooks an' sich things, by the holy stars! we must run when we think best."

The girl hunter turned abruptly away.

"Lead on, Nokomis. I will look at any thing," and, with a look of almost fiendish scorn said to his white tools: "Stay here if you are afraid."

With lowering looks and incoherent curses, which boded ill for the expedition, were the retorts. The two giants remained standing in their tracks, while the Indians led Cecil Crane around a ledge of whitened rocks made ghastly by the presence of some lifeless lichens, and disappeared.

"They're cowards at heart!" muttered the white man. "I heartily wish they would desert me. My red friends are not such fools."

Nokomis leading the way gradually veered to the left as if encircling the peak. The rocks now huge and bare rose about them, mighty canvasses of stone for the hand of nature's artists.

All at once the Upas halted and turned upon the white.

"Our white brother is cunning!" he said. "He can read the signs in the sky and tell about the rain and the sun. Can he read that?"

Cecil Crane saw the Indian pointing to a large rock upon whose side the rays of the morning sun were beating. It seemed ablaze with burnished gold; but a second look revealed some rude lettering thereon, and, eager to see, Cecil Crane stepped aside to obtain a proper view.

The rock towered for thirty feet above him, and there upon its bleached surface was the following sentence:

"Death awaits Cecil Crane in the land of the hidden lodge!"

The Indians watched the workings of the white man's countenance as he read the words sculptured in the rock.

It became white as the snows that crowned the crest of Whiteface, and he started back with quivering lip.

"Who did it?" he cried, pointing to the rock.

"Ask the Manitou!" was the reply. "Red Loon and Nokomis do not know."

Cecil Crane stared at the warning, reading it again and again.

"It is everywhere!" said Nokomis. "Does the white man know what it means?"

"Yes! but it is a lie!" cried Cecil Crane. "What if I left this land to-day?"

"Does the strange marks say that the white man is hunted?" questioned Red Loon curiously. "It makes no difference what they say!" was the tart reply. "I say they lie, and that is enough. Let us go back, if this is all you had to show me."

"It is all now. But the white man will see more by 'm by!"

The party now set out upon their return, and in a short time rejoined the two giants who awaited them.

"Wal, what did the red-skins show ye?" asked Nightwell.

"Something of no moment," was the reply. "I should think not, jedgin' from yer face."

Why, it looks like an iceberg or some sich thing. Simon and me's been thinkin'. Look hyar, Mr. Crane, we hev'n't got one dollar yet fur all our trudgin' in this kentry. Hadn't you better pay up a little?"

Cecil Crane, in no good humor, flashed at the speaker like a heap of ignited powder. Tarsus Nightwell had applied the fire to his ire.

"You know the bargain!" he cried. "You need no money here. If you want to leave my employ you can go—both of you."

"No sech talk as that or thar'll be a row in camp. By the jumpin' jingo we mean business! It looks like death to stay with you. We didn't know this when we came hyar—did we, Simon?"

"Not by a long shot!" growled the second mutineer.

For a moment the white men glared into each other's eyes.

Within the last few hours Cecil Crane had witnessed enough to render him a desperate man. He was desperate.

"Say it quick!" blurted Tarsus Nightwell. "Is it to be money or separation?"

The giant looked at the knife that stuck in his heavy leathern belt, but quick and brief as the glance was, Cecil Crane caught it.

In an instant he took the rifle from Red Loon's hands, and Nightwell, as he started back with a curse, found the muzzle of the cocked weapon at his breast.

Simon Oldfoot stared at the thrilling tableau. "Which will you do now—follow me henceforth without grumbling or die where you stand?" cried Cecil Crane.

"What's the use of puttin' the question in that way?" said the giant, whose face was white. "You've got the upper hand, Mr. Crane; but, by the holy stars, if I hed you whar you hev me thar'd be somebody shot. I don't want to go out just yet, nor in this way, so we'll trump up matters in different shape."

"You're getting sensible now," said Crane, keeping the rifle at Nightwell's breast. "Down! and swear to follow me—no, to carry out your part of the agreement! Both of you down!"

The men did not hesitate, but fell upon their knees, and took the solemn oath which fell from Cecil Crane's lips.

The rifle was then returned to Red Loon, and without another word the party began to descend.

Cecil Crane had quelled a serious mutiny, but he had forced an oath upon two of the greatest vagabonds upon earth.

The foot of the mountain was reached at a place quite distant from the beginning of the ascent. The forest was disfigured by a rough undergrowth of hemlock which impeded locomotion, and progress was necessarily slow.

Muttering to himself, Tarsus Nightwell walked behind his forest companion.

Now and then he laid his hand on the hilt of his knife, and once he tried to push Simon aside. But Oldfoot refused to obey, and shook his head when he saw the knife leap from the leathern belt.

"Not now, Tarsus!" he whispered, and the giant put the blade away, and doggedly resumed the journey.

Cecil Crane was walking over a smoldering volcano; but gold could keep the fires in abeyance.

CHAPTER VII.

PINEY PAUL AND THE WOLVES.

PELOSEE, the island witch, bounded down the mountain side, after dropping Piney Paul into the pit of wolves.

She did not stay to see the ravenous beasts

turn from Death to the rich morsel of brave humanity which she had dropped into their den.

The youth alighted sooner than he had hoped to, and fortunately on a spot unoccupied by the wolves, who, at the further side of the pit, were rending the unfortunate island-dog.

He drew his knife and awaited the merciless onslaught which he believed would soon follow. But in this he was disappointed.

The gaunt animals, six in number, seemed determined to finish Death, the dog, before paying their respects to the new-comer, and the mountain boy, hugging the blood-bespattered wall of the cavern, held his knife ready for the combat.

It soon became evident that the animals were not aware of his presence, for he had dropped noiselessly into the shadows of their rocky cage, while they were contending for the dog's flesh. But this ignorance could not be expected to continue long.

Was there no retreat?

Piney Paul looked up and saw the glitter of the stars; he saw the moonlight lying like silver upon the rim of the basin. But no friendly rope hung over his head, and no voice bade him stand firm until safety came.

Safety! from whence would it come to the boy in the pit of wolves?

He saw the battle end over the last bone. He heard new growls of wolfish rage and blood-thirstiness, and saw mad eyes turn suddenly upon him.

He was discovered, and the fight for life—the forlorn fight as it terribly seemed—was about to begin!

He ran his left hand over the walls about and above him, with the hope that niches or steps might be found in the yielding rocks. Nor was the search fruitless, for his hands touched a shelf in the rock above, and the next moment he stood above the stony projection.

But this good fortune promised little hope, his feet but five feet from the floor; but with the desperation engendered by despair, Piney Paul fell to work on the wall with his knife. The rock yielded, like half-baked clay, and he drew himself up higher.

Now the wolves were at him; they sprung up and scraped the soles of his moccasins, while he held his breath and toiled for life. Glancing down, he saw the eagerness of the bloodthirsty animals. They were contending with themselves for the right to leap at the escaping boy.

Holding with his left hand and feet to the niches, he toiled with his right as a human never toiled before. He saw the stars far above, and the moonlight around the basin's rim seemed as far off as ever.

"Just let me out o' this!" he cried, as if appealing to the glittering orbs of night. "Just let me get out o' this death-hole, an' the she-devil who put me here will know that I can punish. They are on the trail now, and I am here with six wolves ready to tear me limb from limb. Snakes and witches! if I had a ladder!"

The last word had scarcely left the brave boy's lips, when there came a sharp sound, the snapping of steel, and the shining knife, broken at the handle, fell at the feet of the wolves!

Piney Paul was yet several feet from the rim of the basin, and his last avenue of escape now suddenly had closed to him, and life seemed only to be measured by the limits of bodily endurance.

The wolves seemed to comprehend the situation, for their loud howls had ceased, and they were looking up at the mountain boy clinging to the rock wall.

"How long can I hang here?" Piney Paul asked himself. "I might hang for six hours if I was fresh; but I've worked hard to get here, and that's against me. But I'll hang till I drop—that's as certain as they are watching me down there."

He felt the body succumbing to the intense strain endured for an hour or more with great fortitude.

His arms grew heavy and painful from wrist to shoulder, and a numbness attacked his hands.

Piney Paul looked up imploringly to heaven. He saw the dancing firmament, then the form of some overshadowing ogre seemed to darken the mouth of the pit, and a great arm came down after him.

He shrunk involuntarily from the vision, a loud shriek pealed from his throat, and his fingers left the rocky wall.

The wolves sprung to their feet and rushed forward; but the boy did not fall.

On the contrary, he was lifted from the basin by the hand which had appeared to him as the claw of some demon.

He lay white and motionless on the rocks at

the edge of the wolves' den, and a human figure bent over him.

It was Pelosee!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LONG SOUGHT TRAIL.

It was not for the purpose of snatching Piney Paul from the horrors of the basin that Pelosee had returned.

Having dropped her victim among the ravenous animals she fled down the mountain side, nor paused until she found herself amid the undergrowth at the base.

Then fear and terror took sudden possession of her heart. She was returning to Ocotoc without the dog Death!

For years the animal had guarded the island home; he and the imp occupied the same cot; they were inseparable!

What punishment would be visited upon her for the animal's death, Pelosee did not know. But the thought of incurring Ocotoc's blind fury made her halt in the woods and hesitate. She would not face the ogre. Better flight from the island, or death, than that ordeal.

Pelosee turned and went back with the determination of casting herself into the pit and sharing the fate of Piney Paul and Death.

She reached the horrid den in time to see the brave boy reeling into insensibility, and about to give up the struggle which, for two terrible hours, he had carried on with such fortitude.

At sight of him a new desire—an eager resolution—flashed into her heart.

She would not die! She would fly the island, and that with the boy whom she had lately doomed.

Then her hand fell upon Piney Paul, and with her Amazonian strength she drew him out of the jaws of death and laid him down at the rim of the pit!

He lay like one dead in the weird moonlight that lay upon the crest of the mountain. His face was ashy, and his hands were torn by the rough edges of the niches.

But he was not dead; Pelosee saw that the boy, exhausted by his long endurance, had fainted. She did not try to revive him there, but lifted him as he was and went down the mountain.

Behind her the wolves were howling and gnashing their teeth in rage and disappointment.

The first streaks of dawn were penetrating the forest when the witch reached the low land with her still unconscious burden.

Her face was hot and there was triumph in her eye.

Once at the foot of the mountain, Pelosee discovered the path which led to the island hut, and set off through the pines in an almost opposite direction. A short journey brought her to the waters of the lake, and, singular to say, to the very spot where the boat of the mountain boy was moored.

The Indian witch waded into the clear, cold water, and deposited her burden on the bottom of the craft, which she then loosened and took possession of herself. A moment later the little craft was skimming over the water like a swallow, the ripples, tipped with gold by the morning sun, dancing about the stern.

Pelosee plied the paddles with accomplished dexterity, which abundantly proved that she was no novice in their use. When she was not looking at the dark land which lay ahead, her eyes rested upon the boy.

There was much of native gentleness in the glance. The old flash of fire had left the siren's eyes. She loved Piney Paul.

The mainland gradually grew distinct in its varied shapes and shades. The trees stood out in bold individuality, and the mountains, at first so distant, appeared very near.

Piney Paul did not open his eyes until Pelosee with vigorous strokes was darting toward a little cove above which rose a mass of gray rocks!

At first he did not comprehend the situation, but when he saw the face above—when he remembered the dark hand which crept over the edge of the pit in that awful moment—he knew that he was rescued.

His stare was met by a smile that illumined Pelosee's face, and releasing one of the paddles her hand passed gently over his forehead.

"Good! The mountain boy's head is not hot!" she said, with manifest joy. "The wolves will never get him now."

"But where are we going?" asked Paul. "Gimminy crickets! This beats my time all-holler. Say, is this my boat?"

The girl nodded.

"Snakes and witches, what does it all mean, anyhow? Why, we're nigh the mainland. Over

there is Eagle Nest, standing up like a giant! We've got around Deer Island where I met the hunters last night. You didn't go back to the old man. Afraid to go without the dog, eh?"

"Pelosee couldn't stand before Ocotoc and say that the big dog was dead," was the reply.

"He'd fume, I guess, over such a catastrophe," smiled Piney Paul. "I did the work, and I fancy that that kick o' mine got me into the hole, didn't it, Pelosee?"

"Pelosee like big dog, and when the Mountain Cat threw him down to the wolves, arrows of madness, hot as fire, shot into her heart."

"And the Old Harry danced in your eyes," said the boy. "But it's all over now. You came back and saved me. That is good. I owe you a life, Pelosee, and you will not find Piney Paul ungrateful. Where are we going? That's the question that puzzles me, and besides, I'm sort o' hungry."

"Where would the mountain boy like to go?" asked Pelosee, with a curious expression of countenance.

Piney Paul started at the interrogative.

"There's one place above all others, not just now excepting paradise," he cried, with eagerness. "Pelosee, you know where it is. You told me last night that you did. Thither would I go. Where is the lost lodge?"

The little hermit of the Adirondacks watched her with great anxiety and impatience; he held his breath and heard the beating of his own heart.

But Pelosee's eyes wandered from his face, and the paddles rested in the limpid water.

"Where, Pelosee, oh where is it?" cried Piney Paul, unable to restrain his feelings.

"It is where the white-faces will never find it if Pelosee does not tell," she said.

"But you will tell. Yes, you are going to tell me that I may keep her from the hounds that seek her for her blood."

"And the mountain boy would forget Pelosee, and go and live with the lost girl?"

The island witch was jealous.

"But I will never forget you! Why, your hand lifted me from the mouths of the wolves, and I would be a dog if I did not love my red sister for this. Pelosee, I have spent five years of my life among these mountains hunting for the lost lodge. It is lost to me yet. All my trails have ended suddenly like the path on the brink of a precipice. But you know where the hidden wigwam is. Will you not tell me, and together we will go to it?"

Pelosee's eyes flashed with delight.

"Will the white hunter go with Pelosee?" she cried.

"Yes!" was the answer. "Only put an end to my long trails. I will follow you to the lost lodge."

The boat touched the bank as Piney Paul uttered the last words and the occupants debarked.

"Sink the boat!" said Pelosee, and the craft was sent below the surface, there to remain until needed again.

A minute later the pair were pushing through the forest.

"Pelosee," said the boy, suddenly touching his guide's arm and causing her to halt. "We are traveling without arms of any kind. The lost home is far away, perhaps."

"It is far away," was the echo.

"My home is near," he said. "There are weapons there, and food, too, Pelosee."

The girl hesitated and cast her eyes at the sun.

"We can go to the mountain boy's lodge," she said, "but we must not stay long. There are others on the trail."

"Yes, and we must outwit them. Now at last, Cecil Crane, I am on the right trail!"

The halt and consultation resulted in a change of course, and after several hours of uninterrupted journeying, Pelosee for the first time entered Piney Paul's hidden home.

In the light of a cheerful fire the two new friends discussed a meal, and after a brief rest the cave was left behind.

Piney Paul was eager to step upon the long-sought trail. He resolved to follow the Indian girl and to obey her implicitly.

Once more he was threading the damp rocks washed by the stream that thundered by his cave-home. The cliffs towered for many feet above them, but he was leading Pelosee to the woods above by a chasm stairway which to-day is the wonder and delight of tourists.

All at once Pelosee uttered an ejaculation that startled Piney Paul. He turned as her hand fell upon his arm, and beheld her pointing overhead.

He looked up. The gorge was not wide, and

they were midway between the foaming water and the top of the cliffs.

A glance told Piney Paul that the place was not unknown to him, for upon several occasions he had crossed the chasm on the tree which some furious storm had converted into a bridge.

The bridge was there spanning the wild Adirondack river at that giddy height; but it was swaying beneath the weight of a human figure.

Piney Paul and his guide kept their eyes riveted upon the form which, approaching from the left bank of the river, gradually came into view, proceeding with that caution which the hour demanded.

It was the figure of an Indian, and as he reached the middle of the log, with steady tread, Piney Paul whispered to Pelosee:

"Nokomis!"

"One red man has crossed!" was the answer.

"It is Red Loon!" said the boy.

The Upas crossed the dangerous bridge in safety, and then the figure of a white man appeared thereon. He was followed by another member of the race.

"Now for the greatest villain of the gang!" Piney Paul grated through clenched teeth, with his eyes still fixed on the frail bridge. "I don't like to wish any bad things, but I wouldn't try to save him if I saw the bridge giving way beneath him. I wish it would!"

A fifth figure was on the tree, crossing slowly, and with evident trepidation.

"Cecil Crane, I'll end your trail here. You shall not live to baffle me at the very threshold of success."

Piney Paul's eyes were sparkling like coals. The sight of the white man on the log goaded him to uncontrollable madness.

Quick as a flash he raised his rifle, and the click, click of the lock, as the flint flew back, startled Pelosee. She saw the weapon directed upward, caught the flash of the hermit's orbs as they covered the doomed man, and then thrust the rifle downward with her sinewy arm!

"No!" she cried, "not now. The pale-face is on his last trail. His grave must not be the waters."

The boy darted a maddened look at the girl. But she firmly held the rifle down.

"Look up!" she said. "The mountain boy can shoot now."

Piney Paul looked up.

The log was still swinging over the chasm; but Cecil Crane had disappeared.

"It may be all right," said the little hermit; "but it looked like a sin to let that villain escape. He may be on the trail that leads to the hidden lodge, even now."

Pelosee did not reply.

That scene, accompanied by bitter regrets, was to return to her thoughts before many days.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BROKEN INTERVIEW.

FAR UP in the wild Adirondack region, girt in by mountains whose ragged crests lift themselves toward the clouds, lies a placid sheet of water which seems to sleep continually on the bosom of nature.

At the time of which we write—the beginning of the present century—the adventurous white man had not disturbed its repose, and the wildness that encompassed it seemed entirely unbroken by humanity.

It was not a large lake, but large enough, withal, to boast of a wooded island, which, like an emerald gem in dark blue setting, lay in the center. Tall pines, clad in the peculiar foliage that add to the gracefulness of the trees, stood like guardians at the water's edge, and at the proper season dropped their resinous cones into the lake.

The roaming savage in his trails had glanced at the little island and passed on. The prowling panther had swum to it on more than one predatory excursion, and had returned to the mainland with hungry maw, for no game offered itself to his appetite.

But the island was inhabited.

One night several days after the occurrence of the scenes recorded in the last chapter, the figure of a young girl appeared at the water's edge and raised a little boat which had been concealed beneath the surface.

There was grace in the movements of the girlish figure, which was tastefully clad in comfortably fitting forest garb. But the face was white; the long golden hair which fell upon the well-rounded shoulders and rested lightly there contrasted well with the mild blue eyes that glowed beneath long silken lashes. The hair was not confined, and its only ornament was a

tiny arrow tipped with bright feathers; the middle of the shaft was concealed by the flowing tresses, while the shining barb and beautiful feathers conspicuously showed their salient points.

The island beauty was not armed, as if no danger lurked around; and after bailing the boat, an operation which was quickly performed by dextrously tipping it, she stepped into the craft and pulled for the mainland.

A few easy strokes served to bring the boat to the shore, and she left it and for a moment stood revealed in the silvery moonlight which flooded the spot.

It was evident that the girl was keeping an appointed meeting, for her actions denoted this. But who could the lover be, in that wild, unfrequented chamber of nature? We shall see.

Shortly after the landing there came a sound from the shadows of the woods that brought a pleased smile to the girl's face. She did not fly, though the step was cautious and full of stealth, but stood erect with her eyes fixed upon the figure slowly appearing among the pines.

At last she was joined by a person to whom she held out her white hands, and her name, gently spoken by the new-comer, had a musical sound.

"Little Arrow is here. The Red Eagle knew that she would meet him and keep her word."

The speaker was a veritable Indian Apollo. He had not passed his eighteenth year; his form was symmetrical, his clothes close-fitting, and, after the backwoods manner, fashionable; his scalp-lock oiled, like the hair of the dandy. In face he was, for one of his race, remarkably handsome; his eyes were large, lustrous, and full of expression, and the hand that grasped the ornamented rifle which he trailed at his side was womanish in its creation.

That the pair were lovers, notwithstanding the contrasting hue of skin, was evident. The attitude in the moonlight, the deep look into each other's eyes, the meeting, told this.

"I will never turn back when I can meet you," the white girl said, looking up into the Indian's face. "What have you been doing away so long?"

"Red Eagle has been in the forest. He has seen figures there like the beings from Manitouland. They build fires in the mountains, and talk in a language that Red Eagle does not understand."

"Are they white?" asked the girl, curiously.

"Three are white, and the skin of the other two is red," was the reply.

The youth spoke in the almost extinct language of the Mohicans, and Little Arrow answered him fluently in the same tongue.

The girl was perplexed.

"Five persons in the forest?" she said, as if communing with herself; but the wily ears of the young Indian heard.

"Five!" he exclaimed, holding up his left hand with the fingers outspread.

For a moment she was silent; her head lay lightly, pensively, upon her bosom, and when she lifted it it was to say:

"What else has Red Eagle seen? We will not think of the five hunters. They will not find Little Arrow and her father."

The Indian's countenance was troubled. He was ill at ease, and the words of the girl failed to reassure him.

"This did Red Eagle find in the forest!" he said, as his hand glided beneath the folds of his hunting-jacket. "By the falls where the rocks are sharper than knives it lay, as if the rocks had pulled it from the foot."

The speaker held up to the girl a moccasin beaded curiously from heel to toe, and ornamented by fringe, which had met with rough usage in the wood.

Little Arrow greeted the object with an exclamation of wonder, and, taking it from Red Eagle's hand, held it up in the moonlight and admired it.

"Whose can it be?" she asked, with a glance at the Indian. "Was it worn to the rocks, or did the waters carry it to the place?"

"Where Red Eagle found it, there it was lost," was the reply. "There were tracks along the river. Little Arrow, the woods are full of strange people. They are not on the trail for any good. They will be here by and by."

"No, no!" cried the girl, shuddering, and her face grew pale. "Do not say that they will come to the island, Red Eagle. We are happy there."

"But it is not Little Arrow's home," the young Indian said. "She was not born there, but away to the south where the great lodges of the pale-faces are."

"How do you know this? Who has been talking to Red Eagle in the forest?"

"No one has talked to him. His heart says that Little Arrow came from the south. Her face is white. The skin of Patagan is red."

"But I don't know anything about my girlhood," was the reply. "I have always lived here, and with Patagan on the pretty island. No, Red Eagle, I am not from the great cities to the south. I was born here, but why my face is white I do not know. Patagan does, perhaps, but I never bothered him about it. I am happy here."

The Indian seemed baffled on the very threshold of success. The words of the girl nonplused him for a moment.

"Then the white men should go back and make Red Eagle happy, too," he said. "While they are here he cannot smile when the birds sing. They hunt Little Arrow. He is sure of this!"

"But why?" and the girl started. "Who told them that I am here. No, they hunt the one who dropped her moccasin by the river; they do not trail me."

Red Eagle's eyes glistened.

"Red Eagle had not thought of that," he said. "True, how did they know—if they do know—that Little Arrow is here? They will find the girl with one moccasin, and then they will go back."

The white girl smiled, and saw triumph in her lover's eyes.

They seemed to have solved the mystery of the strangers' presence in the Adirondack woods.

But the period of congratulation was brief, indeed, for the sounds of footsteps and voices fell suddenly upon their ears. Red Eagle turned to the woods and with flashing eyes listened for a moment, like a tiger brought to bay.

"Back to the island," he whispered to his companion. "The panthers from the south are in the woods; they must not find the white bird here."

Little Arrow did not wait, but stepped into the canoe and pushed from the shore.

The shadows of the island pines stretched their grotesque arms far into the lake, and once among them the boat came to a halt, and Little Arrow turned her face toward the shore.

Red Eagle stood in the light until he saw the boat glide into the gloom, when he caught a stout pine bough and dextrously lifted his figure up into the dense foliage.

The young red-skin had scarcely time to ensconce himself in the tree when five persons reached the water's edge.

He looked down through the pines and counted five men—three whites and two Indians.

"Well, here we are, and nothing yet," said one of the whites, in evident bad-humor. "But there's an island that doesn't look big enough to hold a wigwam. Is this the end of this long trailing, Red Loon? I have trusted you and Nokomis. By the distant gods! if you trifle with me, you shall be paid, not in gold, but in the coin which trifling or treachery merits."

"Tell the white man that Red Loon is not fooling him," said the chief, in the Mohican tongue, to Nokomis. "Tell him that the lost lodge is very near—that the white girl will soon be his if he keeps his tongue still and don't make Red Loon mad."

These words were intelligible to the occupant of the tree; they made him start.

Nokomis turned upon the white man.

"None of your Indian lingo!" cried Cecil Crane, before the last Upas could deliver Red Loon's message. "Why can't you two talk like decent people? What did Red Loon say, anyhow?"

"He said that he fools not the white man—that the girl is near."

"Then why doesn't he lead us to the lodge?" was the retort. "I'm in the very heart of this devil-land. I'm getting tired of this—so are my men."

He glanced as he uttered the last sentence at the two whites, who, standing side by side like statues, had not spoken.

"Tired, you say?" growled one of them, now. "It's got to stop soon, Mr. Crane! We've followed the Indians about long enough, and we'll shift for ourselves pretty soon."

The Indians did not reply; they were bending toward the shore as if examining it.

"See!" cried Red Loon, rising suddenly, and pointing with pride to the ground, as he looked up at Cecil Crane. "Whose feet makes the little tracks? Will the white man say now that the Indians guide him falsely?"

Eager to inspect the signs, the girl-hunter stooped. His example was followed by the two

white men, while Red Loon was directing his companion's attention to the shadow of the island pines.

"Look, Nokomis! It is blacker than the shadows," he was saying. "We are at the end of the trail; the hidden lodge is there!"

The chief's hand was outstretched, and the Upas, bending eagerly forward, with the flash of triumph and greed in his little eyes, was trying to make out the dark object on the water.

"It moves," said Red Loon.

"What moves, Injun?" cried Tarsus Nightwell, rising at the sound of the chief's voice.

Red Loon did not reply, but relapsed into slowness.

"No foolin', hyar!" was Nightwell's threatening retort to Red Loon's changed mood. "You saw somethin', by Jehosaphat! You did, out thar on the water. Look, Simon! kin you see it? The Injuns are hatching up somethin' of their own."

At the giant's words and threatening demeanor, Red Loon stepped back and drew his tomahawk.

"Oh, is that yer game?" cried Nightwell, springing forward. "Thar's no Injun in these woods what kin browbeat me. You two are infernal liars! You saw somethin' out thar—somethin' what you want to keep to yerselves!"

The representative of the noble Mohican tribe did not shrink back. His eyes glared angrily at the giant, and a collision was inevitable.

Cecil Crane saw the situation of affairs at a glance, and quick as thought he planted himself between the contending races.

The next moment there was the sharp report of a rifle, and Red Loon staggered back and sunk upon his knees at the edge of the water!

The forest rung with the echoes of that deadly shot.

"It is the beginning of the end, and the end is not far away."

The voice started the occupants of the bank.

The faces of Cecil Crane and the two giants grew white, and Nokomis stood gazing upward, as if expecting his doom from the depths of the stars.

But the voice startled another person.

While the echoes still filled the forest, there came the horrid shriek of a human being from among the pine boughs, and a heavy body descended and dropped among the astonished group.

With exclamations of terror the four started back, while the wraith bounded up, and with a cry disappeared in the forest.

It was the Red Eagle!

CHAPTER X.

PELOSEE AGAIN.

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the shot that dropped the crested Mohican at the edge of the lake, the boat in the piny shadows shot suddenly toward the island. It darted through the waters like an arrow, and soon disappeared.

Little Arrow's face was a strange admixture of fear and anxiety.

"They do not want the girl with the one moccasin," she said, glancing at the beautiful shoe that lay at her feet. "They come for me; they want to take me from Patagan, and to tear Red Eagle away."

As the white girl spoke, there came the dip of oars from the left, and she beheld a canoe gliding silently and swiftly through the moonlight toward her.

Its approach had been noiseless and certain, and Little Arrow, when she saw it, uttered a cry of alarm, for it was quite near.

She saw the single figure that bent to the paddles, saw that the person was one of her own sex, and, instead of being reassured, took new alarm.

It was in vain that the frightened girl threw all her strength into the task of propelling the canoe; the new craft gained rapidly upon her, and at last she saw the futility of an attempt to escape.

The pursuing boat shot swiftly alongside, and its occupant leaned over and clutched Little Arrow's right arm!

"White girl must stop!" cried the pursuer, sternly, as Little Arrow dropped the paddles and looked into her face. "Pelosee is strong enough to hold her if she tries the paddles again!"

Little Arrow saw the flashing eyes that seemed to burn her face; she noticed the fantastic dress of her captor, and saw at a glance that Pelosee was a very giantess.

The white maiden submitted.

For many moments the ogre's child looked curiously into the face of her captive. It was white and very beautiful. It was the face of

a girl, and, in its girlish innocence, spiritually pure.

It seemed the hawk looking at the dove in its talons.

"Where is the lodge?" asked Pelosee, suddenly. Little Arrow sent a glance full of fear toward the island, which now lay between them and the scene of the love meeting.

"Is it there?" asked the island witch, noting the rapid glance. "Pelosee knew it was near the big cave. Is it yender, white girl?"

"Why do you want to know?" said Little Arrow. "Are you the owner of this?"

She was holding the moccasin up to Pelosee.

"It is mine!" was the cry that greeted the shoe. "Pelosee lost it with the mountain boy at the loud water."

"The mountain boy?" echoed the white captive. "Red Eagle found it at the waterfall."

The moccasin was snatched from Little Arrow's hand and flung upon the bottom of Pelosee's canoe.

"Come!" said the giantess. "White girl must go with Pelosee."

But the captive shrunk back shuddering.

The Indian girl's gripe tightened on her arm.

"Must go!" Pelosee's eyes flashed madly.

"The mountain boy has hunted long for the white girl."

Little Arrow could not resist; she was powerless in the hands of Ocotoc's princess.

Before she could remonstrate, she was lifted bodily from the boat and placed before the Indian girl, whose terrible eyes almost made her cower at her feet. She believed that she had fallen into the clutches of a demoness!

Pelosee left the little boat where she had relieved it of its occupant, and seizing the paddles of her own, put about and started for the mainland, which was now cast in shadow by the descent of the moon.

Not a word fell from the lips of either girl as the boat glided swiftly through the water.

Little Arrow sat before her captor, quivering from head to foot with an indefinable dread that sent a chill to her heart. The feeling was new to her. Up to that eventful night, her life had flowed uninterrupted in a gentle stream. She had known no foe; saw the exhibition of no passion save the gentlest one, and believed the world as good as her own sweet self.

On the other hand, Pelosee was controlled by different feelings. Her eyes were full of triumph and revenge; her breast heaved with one of the storms of her wild life. The crouching girl at her feet seemed the victim of some sacrifice which she, a proud, red priestess, was guiding to the altar of death.

She feasted her flashing eyes upon the dove-like beauty of her captive as the canoe swept toward the shore. Her arms rapidly lessened the distance, and when Little Arrow finally looked up she saw the trees, like gigantic ghosts, towering before her.

Pelosee ran the boat against the grassy bank which yielded, and the craft remained firmly wedged there—moored without the aid of a rope. Then the island witch rose and motioned her captive to follow her, which she did, and the two stepped upon the bank.

Little Arrow cast an anxious glance toward the island, now hidden somewhere among the shadows that covered the lake, and felt Pelosee's hand on her arm again.

"To the white hunter now!" said the Indian. "But, stay! Does the white girl love the little mountain boy?"

The white maiden looked up strangely into Pelosee's face.

"What mountain boy?" she said. "Little Arrow knows no young man but the Red Eagle."

"Then she will not love the young cat of the pines?"

"She loves Red Eagle."

Pelosee uttered a cry of joy.

She lifted her captive from her ground, and held her out at arm's length in an outburst of admiration, as the child holds her doll.

"Pelosee and Little Arrow will be sisters!" she cried. "But if she smiles upon the Mountain Cat, then to her heart reddens the knife of Ocotoc's child."

Little Arrow shuddered at the shining blade which flashed in her face.

"Pelosee need not fear. Red Eagle is my warrior."

Was that a step that startled the two girls? They heard the sound like the snapping of a twig, and instinctively turned toward it. The next instant, with a cry of joy, Little Arrow wrenched herself from Pelosee's grasp, and sprung toward a crouching figure that hugged the trunk of a pine several feet away.

As she left the witch's side, the figure at the tree rose and caught her on an arm hastily flung out, and Pelosee found herself almost hurled to the ground.

With a cry of rage the scarlet captor regained her feet, and bounded forward again; but the person who held Little Arrow so securely, pushed her back once more.

The giantess had found her match in strength.

Three times the maddened Indian threw herself upon her savage-like antagonist, for the purpose of rescuing her captive; but by a dextrous movement on his part, her knife was knocked from her grasp and sent spinning into the depths of the lake.

At last the unknown assumed the offensive, and thrust Pelosee to the water's edge. She saw him then, an athletic young Indian, and his eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire.

Strength was his passion. He forced her feet into the water, and then flung her over the boat headlong into the lake!

Having performed this feat, he turned to Little Arrow with a laugh of victory, and the two darted into the forest.

After a moment's submersion Pelosee came to the surface and seized the canoe by the aid of which she speedily regained the shore.

But her foe and the late captive were gone.

The only thing that greeted her was a knife that lay on the ground.

She picked it up and springing to a tree buried it deep in the resinous wood.

"The white girl shall not be Pelosee's sister," she said, madly. "The five hunters and the little Mountain Cat shall not find her. Pelosee will trail her and her red brave, and thus she will drive the knife to their hearts!"

She tried to pull the blade from the tree, but the wood held it fast.

In her anger she snapped it and flung the handle into the water.

"It is well!" she cried. "When the knife is in her heart Pelosee will break it!"

That night, upon the shore of the mountain-locked lake, another obstacle—the revenge of a baffled woman—was flung upon the trail of Piney Paul, the young hermit.

CHAPTER XI. A FRIEND IN NEED.

THE shooting of the Red Loon, so unexpected and mysterious, threw consternation into the ranks of Cecil Crane's party, as we have seen.

The dropping of Red Eagle from the pines and his rapid flight into the forest still further startled them, and they did not recover until the young Indian had disappeared.

At the edge of the little lake, with his feathered scalp-lock touching the water, lay the prostrated red-man. The wild rolling of his eyes told his companions that life still remained, and now and then a convulsive movement bathed one red arm in the lake.

"Whar did it come from?" cried Tarsus Nightwell, the first to break the silence. "Thar was no flash that anybody saw, and the voice seemed to come down from the trees somewhar."

"The slayer has fled," said Cecil Crane. "Did you not see him fly into the forest?"

"That war not the killer!" retorted the giant. "Cecil Crane, the imp what fell from the pines and then darted inter the woods war an Injun. I see'd enough of him to know, an' he never shot them words at you—never!"

Cecil Crane gave the speaker a frightened look.

"It war the same voice what struck you so forcibly on Deer Island!" continued Nightwell. "Was that an Injun? Go an' look at Red Loon, go an' see if the old feller has anything to say."

Crane moved toward the stricken chief, who recognized him as he knelt at his side.

"Does Red Loon know who shot him?" the white man asked.

The Indian ground his teeth.

"It wasn't Oootoc!" he said, between his gasps. "It was the Mountain Cat who is on the white man's trail."

"Thar! didn't I tell you so?" cried Nightwell, who had caught Red Loon's words. "It war the boy—the Injuns call him the Mountain Cat, I guess."

Cecil Crane looked up nonplused.

"Mountain Cat, or not, I am not afraid of him," he said.

"You'd better be, I'm thinkin'," was the response.

"And why? Did I come to this accursed region to be beaten back without the object of my search? No! Tarsus Nightwell, you do not

know me. Where is the slayer? I wish he were here now."

The last sentence, spoken with the defiance of a desperate man, was echoing over the sleeping water, when several pine cones dropped at the feet of the speaker, and the next moment a figure with human outlines fell from the tree.

"I am here, Cecil Crane!" cried the newcomer, as the giants and Nokomis started from the apparition, leaving their master to confront it alone. "We were destined to meet in these fastnesses, and by the holy stars! we might as well meet here!"

Unable to speak, Cecil Crane gazed at the boyish figure that stood before him with the moonlight full upon the piney plume and close-fitting fringed garb of buck-skin.

"I am here! What have you got to say about it?"

Then the man found his tongue.

"I want you to quit following me with your accursed threatenings!" he cried, his evil eyes flashing at the boy, who was none other than Piney Paul.

"Threatenings?" was the echo, and the boy's glance went to the Mohican lying motionless and death-like now at the water.

"Is that the result of threats?" he cried, triumphantly.

"Does that dead red-skin say that I do not mean what I have said? Didn't you hear your doom on the island, Cecil Crane? Witches and snakes! You will soon be convinced that I do not lie."

The girl-hunter did not reply until his glance had sought his companions, whose figures were not to be seen.

Was he alone with the trailer—the person who thirsted for his blood because he sought the hidden lodge?

"We are not alone," said Piney Paul, interpreting his rapid glance. "Your followers are not far away. Say on, Cecil Crane. I am here to listen and to tell you something."

"I don't know you," the man said. "I have not much to say. I want no dealings with you. Keep away from me—that is all I ask."

"All!" and the boy smiled. "I am sure you are very liberal! Stars and garters! I am much obliged to you. I will obey when I deem obedience the proper thing to do. You don't know me! Well, I am not surprised that you have forgotten me, as we never met but once, and then the encounter was not a pleasant one for me. I know your mission to these solitudes as well as you know it yourself. You shall fail!"

"Curse you!" cried Cecil Crane, striding forward; but a rifle was suddenly lifted before him. "We'll end the matter here—yes, here! where your cowardly bullet killed my red friend."

But the maddened man was suddenly halted by the muzzle of the rifle which was thrust into his face.

"Stand! or by the living stars I'll let the moonlight through you! No trifling here. I didn't come for that."

"Nor I; so we agree on that score. Who are you, anyhow?"

"One who will not let you find the lost lodge," was the reply.

Cecil Crane drew back. There seemed prophecy in the determined voice and visage before him.

Piney Paul stood before him with no thought of retreat.

All at once there was a sound that startled the antagonists on the shore of the lake. It was the twang of a bow-string, and it came from the forest into which Cecil Crane's companions had retreated.

Fast upon it came a loud cry from Piney Paul, and dropping the rifle he staggered back with a barbed and feathered shaft sticking through his arm!

Cecil Crane sprang upon him with an exclamation of tigerish rage and triumph, and before the boy could draw the knife hidden beneath his buck-skin jacket, he held him by the throat and pushed him helplessly back.

"When you follow me again it will not be in the flesh!" the man hissed. "I care not to know who you are now; no one will seek to know when I am through with you. Here he is, my good fellows; the arrow went clear through his arm. Did Nokomis try to wing the eagle, or to kill him?"

His last words were spoken to the three figures which had followed the shaft from the wood.

Nokomis, the Upas, held a bow in his red hands, and his eyes rested upon Piney Paul with much malignance.

"No you don't, Tarsus!" said Cecil Crane, pushing the giant's hand from his arm. "The captive is mine, and I'm going to put an end to

his infernal trailing. The race between us for the hidden lodge ends here, so far as he is concerned! Tie him there, Simon. No! take the rope away, I will attend to him without having him bound."

When Cecil Crane released his grasp, the youth would have fallen exhausted to the ground; but the hand was transferred to his arm and he was firmly held.

He suddenly jerked Piney Paul upright, and flung him against a pine, holding him the while. Then he caught the shaft, which had passed entirely through the arm, and gave it a hard wrench. But the arrow, instead of coming out, snapped with a click, and left the barb in the boy's flesh!

There was no cry of pain at this exhibition of brutality. Piney Paul's eyes glared madly at his tormentor; but his lips, white and clenched, did not essay a word.

"Hold him a moment, Nokomis!" said the villain, suddenly, as he turned upon the Indian, and thrust the boy toward him.

The next moment Piney Paul was in the hands of his red betrayer.

"Now we'll finish the work!" said Cecil Crane, as he picked up the boy's rifle. "We'll get rid of one imp who might do us an amount of injury. Hold him out, now, Nokomis. I won't touch you. One blow will finish the wild-cat."

The spectators saw the rifle lifted above Cecil Crane's head, as he stepped forward, his eyes glaring at the mountain boy.

"What ar' ye goin' to do?" cried Simon Oldfoot. "Ye ar'n't goin' to hit 'im with the gun, ar' ye?"

"Just exactly what I'm going to do!" was the reply. "Stand back or there'll be brains and blood on your clothes!"

The giants looked at each other, and then glanced at the executioner. There was no mercy in his eyes. They shot murder from their depths.

Piney Paul looked at the uplifted rifle without a move. Then he glanced at Nokomis and saw a strange light flash in his eyes.

"The wolves!" he said to the Upas. "Has Nokomis forgotten?"

These words, though heard by Cecil Crane, were not understood.

Nokomis, with the suddenness of thought, jerked the boy from beneath the uplifted weapon, and thrust his own scarlet body beneath it.

"The boy belongs to Nokomis! His arrow is in his arm!"

Cecil Crane uttered an oath and dropped the rifle.

"Yours by the law of the woods, I suppose; but will not Nokomis sell the boy?"

Nokomis did not reply.

"If he is yours, you will sell!" continued Cecil Crane. "Come, we will play fair. Perhaps he is yours. It is your arrow in his arm; that we all admit. He is against me; he is a snake in my path, but see! he would not spare Red Loon, Nokomis's brother. Has the Indian no hate? Does he not avenge the blood of Red Loon?"

"No!" was the reply. "Red Loon was a Mohican, and his people fought the Upas till they all fell but Nokomis. Why should he strike the Mountain Cat for his shot? Some day Red Loon and Nokomis would have fought."

Cecil Crane looked baffled.

"You Indians are all alike, I guess," he grated. "What are you going to do with the little devil?"

The reply did not come in words. Nokomis released Piney Paul, who stepped from his side.

"Go!" was the whispered command from the Indian's lips. "Nokomis has not forgotten the wolves."

The boy shot the Upas a look full of gratitude, and then glanced at the whites.

"Do you set him free?" roared Cecil Crane.

"Dog of an Indian! I will not submit. By the stars of heaven! I, at least, will assert my right to punish the person who seeks my life. Stand aside!"

Piney Paul, anticipating this outburst of wrath, did not fly. He saw the Upas plant himself firmly between him and Cecil Crane, and held his breath.

The girl-hunter darted at him, but he was suddenly caught by the red athlete and lifted bodily from the ground. The next instant the white man was flung into the lake!

Exclamations of rage broke from the throats of the giants.

"That's too much!" cried Tarsus Nightwell. "Simon, the Injun's too forward in the matter. Give him the upper hand, an' away we go!"

The speaker sprang forward; but Nokomis, stirring not, met him calmly.

"Without Nokomis, the big white men will never leave this country," he said. "Would

they kill him, and become food for the vultures and the wolves?"

The giant halted.

"It's no use, Simon," he said; "the Injun speaks the truth."

But Simon Oldfoot did not answer; he was assisting Cecil Crane from the water.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLOOD ON THE KNIFE.

PINEY PAUL did not wait to note the result of the Indian's quarrel with his employer, but quitted the scene and bounded through the forest.

The events of the last hour had been so startling as to appear incredible. Concealed in the pine, he had witnessed the meeting of Red Eagle and the white girl of the island, and every word of theirs had fallen upon his ears.

The sight of Little Arrow had opened a new revelation to him. The hidden lodge sought so long was not a myth; he felt that he had looked upon its occupant in the person of the fair white girl, whose boat had glided to the shadows that hung around the distant island.

Pelosee had not guided him wrongly. Her knowledge of the lost wigwam had not deceived him.

With such thoughts as these the Adirondack boy hurried through the woods with the stubborn shaft still in his flesh. He had no weapon save the knife concealed in his bosom; his rifle lay at the scene of the late rencontre.

He it was who frightened the young Red Eagle from the pine, for he discharged his rifle over the chief's shoulder, at Red Loon, and, until that moment unaware of his presence, the Mohican youth started only to fall from his perch to the ground.

Piney Paul at last reached the spot where he had left Pelosee a few hours before. But he found it deserted, and nettled by the red girl's absence, he drew some venison from the recesses of a pine tree, and began to satisfy his hunger.

"It was a narrow shave," he said. "That Indian has got a few sparks of gratitude in his heart, and I will try to remember it. The hidden lodge is not far away. I saw Cicely tonight. She is the hidden girl. The Indian saw the boat on the lake when I shot him. Perhaps he would have told them. But he will not tell now. Thunder and witches! didn't that Indian boy drop when he saw me in the tree! I wish he hadn't dropped, for I wanted to make use of him."

Beneath the boughs of the pine the boy continued to discuss the jerked venison as he communed with his thoughts.

But all at once there came the whirring sound of a missile flying through the air, and a knife was buried in the tree against which he stood gnawing the venison.

Starting forward with a glance at the weapon quivering there, Piney Paul stood face to face with Pelosee.

The garments of the Indian girl were dragged and soiled. The sleeve of her jacket was ripped from shoulder to elbow, and displayed the naked arm; and she was otherwise in a forlorn condition.

But her eyes flashed like the orbs of the triumphant mountain cat when after a long fight it stands over the body of its antagonist. Her visage startled the boy, and his first word was an exclamation called forth by it.

"What has happened?" he cried, grasping her arm. "You have grappled with some enemy! Tell me, Pelosee, all about it, and why you left the spot where you were to wait for me. The boat is gone! Did you take it?"

There was no reply, but Pelosee sprung to the tree, and with a display of strength drew the deeply-buried knife from the wood.

Then she seized our hero's arm and drew him to a spot upon which the starlight uninterruptedly fell.

"See!" she cried, fiendishly, thrusting the blade before his face. "It is red! red! Let Pelosee have the white boy's hand. There! does he not feel the blood on the wood and the iron?"

A shudder crept to Piney Paul's heart. He began to believe that the island witch was mad.

"But the blood—how came it here?" he said, looking into her triumphant face. "Tell me! who did you meet in the forest?"

"Pelosee saw the flower of the hidden lodge," was the answer, which further startled Piney Paul and whitened his face. "She followed her in her boat and caught her. Ha! ha! But a young Indian tore her from Pelosee and hurled Ocotoc's child into the lake. He was little but stronger than Pelosee. They fled together; but Pelosee followed swearing to have the blood of

both, for did not the wigwam girl go with the Indian when Pelosee was taking her to the Mountain Cat?"

"No! you did not come up with them and kill Cicely!" cried Piney Paul, jumping at the conclusion of the girl's narration.

"Does the white boy see the blood on Pelosee's knife?" was the reply. "Does he see the tear in her sleeve and the loss of her fringe? And see the moccasin which Pelosee lost by the waterfall. The hidden rose had it; but it is on Pelosee's foot again."

There was the triumph of a maddened witch in the red girl's look and tone. It made Piney Paul start back and gasp for breath like a suffocating man. He believed that he stood before the slayer of Cicely, the long-lost girl; he saw the victory of murder in Pelosee's eyes.

"Did you do it in your madness?" he cried, springing forward impulsively. "Did you shed the blood of the lost girl? If you did, by the heavens, I have no right to spare you, though you saved my life!"

The witch laughed demoniacally, and with her right hand held him off at arm's length.

"It was a mad fight!" she cried. "Pelosee struck many times. But he lies in the forest and the wolves will come upon him before it is light. He stood between Ocotoc's child and the flower of the lost lodge. See the tear in Pelosee's sleeve! He did that."

"But who did it?" cried Piney Paul. "You have followed Cicely with death in your heart, and there is blood on your knife. No more of this, girl-witch! Gimmimy crickets! I can't stand this suspense. Don't hold me so tight. I've got an arrow in that arm. Who did you kill?"

"The king of the forest! Pelosee was not afraid to meet him. The bear is dead on the white flower's trail!"

"A bear!" cried Piney Paul. "Thank God! it was not Cicely!"

"A big bear!" was the reply, and the girl's eyes flashed anew. "If he had not stopped Pelosee, it would have been the rose."

Piney Paul drew a breath of relief; but his eyes flashed madly as he cried:

"You have saved my life. I owe you much; but you must not touch her. I will kill the person who harms her, though it be even you."

Pelosee's reply was a scornful and derisive laugh.

"I mean business," said the boy. "Try it on, if you think I don't!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RED WITCH'S DESERTION.

"AFFAIRS would wear a different aspect if you hadn't pushed my gun down when I had Cecil Crane covered on the log," continued Piney Paul, sorely nettled by Pelosee's laugh. But I guess I won't make anything by quarreling with you. I'm in poor plight to follow the trail now, and contend with the foes who will face me. No gun—nothing but a knife! Where's your rifle?"

"Broken where the bear lies dead!" was the reply. "And where is the Mountain Cat's gun?"

"Where I met the five traitors and shot Red Loon. They've got it now, and will try to make use of it. Have you ever been in these parts before?"

"Once, but it was long ago. Ocotoc and Pelosee came here where Patagan and the white rose lived on the island. She was a little girl then just so high," illustrating with her hand, "and she looked like a wild flower just bursting from its bud."

"That was long ago, sure enough," said Piney Paul. "We don't want anything to do with Patagan. If he finds that Cicely is missing—that she has run off with that hot-headed young Red Eagle—he will leave his island and we will have a new enemy. The girl is somewhere in the woods. I know now that she still lives; my trail is drawing to an end."

"Yes," the red witch said, pointing to the knife; "but it is getting bloody."

"Only one life taken thus far," was the reply.

"Two—three!" said Pelosee.

"Three?"

"The Red Loon, the bear, and the dog!" "I don't count the animals," Piney Paul said, with a smile, but when he recollected the circumstances that surrounded Death's taking off a shudder went to his heart.

"It will soon be light, and the trail of Red Eagle and the girl will be plain. Does the boy want to follow?"

"Certainly I do! Witches and serpents! I

want no grass to grow under my feet from this time to the end. Where can we strike the trail?"

"Where the bear lies."

The twain, united again, left the spot, and found the bear lying on the field of battle quite dead. The evidences of a protracted struggle between Pelosee and the brute were plentiful and terribly suggestive. The island witch had sought rather than avoided a combat with bruin. Proud of her strength she had called him a coward, and taunted him after the usual Indian manner. Hungry and ferocious, the king of the Adirondack woods did not fly, but advanced boldly to meet his antagonist.

In vain he tried to inclose Pelosee in the fatal embrace; but the knife came into play, and, after a hard struggle, bruin yielded, and Pelosee staggered fainting from the fight.

At the halt made at the carcass the girl described in graphic language the battle to Piney Paul, and picked up the discarded rifle with the remark that, after the blow that rendered it useless, she had cast it aside.

The boy took the weapon and eyed it for a moment. The long barrel clung feebly to the stock, but he saw that it was not unfit for future service. Several good sirews could restore the weapon, and render it useful on the new trail.

"See!" he cried, as his face lit up with hope. "A good sinew, girl, and your rifle may yet ring out upon the trail. There's life in the gun yet. Gimmimy! this is luck!"

Pelosee produced a strong cord made from twisted sinews, and, seating himself upon the carcass of the bear, Piney Paul mended the weapon.

"There!" he said at last, holding the gun up to the girl. "Who shall carry it—you or I?"

"The Mountain Cat mended it and he shall carry it," was the reply.

Leaving the huge animal on the field of his last battle, Piney Paul resumed the trail with a light heart. It was quite plain to his practiced eye, and Pelosee followed it with the flash of vengeance in her eyes.

The day broke over the rim of the hidden horizon, and the long arrows of light penetrated the forest. They revealed the trailers and their surroundings; the rough ground over which the track of Red Eagle and his *protege* led; the sky-seeking pines and the fuzzy undergrowth. It was a prospect decidedly uninviting and gloomy.

It soon became evident that the young Mohican was not going to return Little Arrow to the island. Piney Paul could tear her from Patagan with comparative ease; but as it was, loose in the forest and with a determination to keep the girl for himself, the arts of the Indian would be used for that purpose.

The long day—long in many respects to Piney Paul—drew to a close with the trail still before them, and stretching on into the seemingly interminable forest.

Red Eagle seemed to be flying to some place beyond the Adirondacks.

"Stop!" said Paul, pausing, and laying his hand on the arm of the eager Pelosee.

"We must stop till morning here. The shadows are long and the forest will be dark. Pelosee, Red Eagle is running as if all the imps on earth were reaching for his scalp-lock."

The girl turned upon Piney Paul a displeased countenance.

"Pelosee will not rest her feet here!" she said, pointing toward the gloom that gathered ahead.

"Why, it's nonsense! I'll be hanged if it isn't. You can't see anything out there, if your eyes are extra good. They must rest sometimes; they will not rest always."

"While we trail, they rest, and while we rest they fly."

"There's something in that, I admit," the boy said. "Do you hear the river?"

Pelosee nodded.

"It is the crazy water," she said. "The Red Eagle and his girl cannot cross."

"But they can follow the stream. We stop here."

Piney Paul saw the futility of attempting to trail in the dark forests of the Adirondacks. He determined to wait till day. Rest was needed by nature; it would refresh him.

But Pelosee would not listen. She turned a deaf ear to the boy's judgment, and started stubbornly forward.

"You will leave me!" he said.

"Pelosee's eyes are like the owl's. The forest trails are hers."

"It's no use to reason with you, I guess," Piney Paul answered. "You can go! But, stay one moment. What if you find them?"

"Pelosee will tell the Mountain Cat; but not now."

"You mean mischief. The very old Harry has got into you. You are mad at Cicely. What will you do? Tell me."

He laid his hand menacingly on the rifle, which stood against a tree.

There was no reply, for Pelosee sprung away, and fled like a startled fawn through the forest.

Her figure disappeared in the twinkling of an eye, and the boy found himself alone in a portion of the Adirondack region which he had never before visited. His search for Cicely had never extended so far to the north. The ground about him was truly a *terra incognita*, and it might prove a land of death. He knew of but one man familiar with the trails of the northern mountains, and that man was Nokomis. To the last Upas the fastnesses of the Adirondacks were what a well studied map is to the school-boy.

Hunted everywhere by the ancient enemies of his race, Nokomis had familiarized himself with the forest trails. He knew the various caves; the hiding-places that offered themselves under the cataracts, the dens of the wolves, and the lairs of the panthers.

But he had allied himself to Cecil Crane's party, though, as we have seen, he saved the cave-boy from that villain's uplifted rifle. He undoubtedly acted as their guide, and Piney Paul must expect no assistance from that quarter.

The mountain boy did not despair when he found himself deserted by that strange admixture of love, jealousy, and revenge, Pelosee!

"I'm alone now, and in a strange land; but there's no turning back!" he cried. "Cicely is somewhere ahead, and everybody in these woods lifts hands against me. Stars and panthers! it's a bad condition of affairs; but I'll make it look better. I will, sure as shooting!"

He did not follow the deserting witch. The shadows had already hidden her form; he ceased to hear her feet crushing the pine cones.

"To the river, better perhaps," he said. "I'll go on to the stream. It isn't far away, and I'll be that far advanced when daylight comes."

He thus abandoned his intention of halting at the chosen spot, but started forward again, and soon stood upon the bank of a river whose waters, unseen in the night, filled his ears with the sound of their dashing.

"I'll take the old bed to-night," he said, with a smile, as he drew himself up into the recesses of a pine. "By and by, I'll get out of this country—that is if I get Cicely—and quit sleeping in the trees."

A moment served to ensconce the youth in the friendly pine, and he was adjusting his head to the uncomfortable fork that offered its services as a pillow, when a voice came up from below.

"What's that?" ejaculated Piney Paul, leaving his perch and dropping to the ground. "Somebody is ahead of me. It wasn't Pelosee's voice. Was it Red Eagle's?"

Far below him the river flowed through the bottom of a gorge, at the top of which he knelt, listening for a repetition of the sound.

Below, the blackness of starry night hid everything from his sight. He could not see the rocks upon which he knelt. Rifle in hand, he listened until the same voice came up through the mist and the gloom.

"I'm hanging to the rocks! For the love of God, Tarsus—Simon—save me! You will not let me die here. Where is Nokomis? Help! villains! friends! Where, in the name of Tarsus, are you?"

"Thunder and guns! it is Cecil Crane!" cried Piney Paul. "Will they answer him?"

But no reply came to the appeal of the unseen man.

"Tarsus, have you left me?" came the agonizing voice again. "I can't hold out much longer. My hands are slipping even now. All my gold for life and safety! God curse the fiends—the traitors—who will leave me to perish here!"

Piney Paul leaned over the precipice.

"Hold out a minute!" he cried to the unseen man—his inveterate enemy.

"I can, perhaps," was the response. "But you must not save me. You are Piney Paul."

"That's so, Cecil Crane; but I never went back on any man when I found him crying for life. Hold to the rocks. I'm coming down!"

With the bravery that seemed foolhardiness, Piney Paul swung himself over the edge of the rugged precipice and began to let himself down to the man who had pleaded so earnestly for life and safety.

He was upon unknown ground. The earth,

loosened by his adventuresome feet, went rattling down into the abyss, and lost itself in the rushing river.

"You're coming, sure enough," gasped the imperiled man. "But, oh, God, your speed doesn't match the snail's. Do you think I can hold here, with the water trying to pull me away, till morning?"

"And do you think I'm going to let all hold go and come down to you like a cannon ball?" was the tart response. "You wouldn't find me so accommodating if I caught you up in a pine, Cecil Crane."

The descent continued, and the boy found himself at the foot of the cliff, and not far from the spot from whence the voice had proceeded.

But he did not call to Cecil Crane for his exact position.

He heard another voice.

"Ye'll rouse the very wildcats by yer hollerin'," said the rough and unseen speaker. "I'm comin' as fast as I kin. One shin is knocked forty ways for Sunday, now. Whar are yer, Crane? an' warn't ye speakin' to somebody awhile back?"

"Right here I am!" came the response. "Take my arm and pull me out. There! God! another minute and I would have been gone. Speaking to somebody, Tarsus? Yes! Call Nokomis and Simon down here. That infernal boy is hereabouts. He was coming down to finish me. No! don't call Nokomis; but find the little devil yourself, Tarsus, and we'll finish him. He's very close!"

"But it is dark and dangerous!" was the response.

"He couldn't have been ten feet away when you came. Look! what is that against that rock?"

Cecil Crane pointed toward the only rock visible by its white surface in the gorge.

Tarsus Nightwell, with a cry of "the brat, by hokey!" started forward.

But a wild shout rung in his ears, and the dark figure against the rock sprung past him and pushed Cecil Crane over the slippery stones.

With a loud cry the ungrateful wretch disappeared beneath the dashing waters!

"That's what a fellow gets for repudiating a good turn!" cried Piney Paul's voice. "Fish him out, Tarsus Nightwell, for his time hasn't come yet!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HUNTERS OF NOKOMIS.

WITH a hurried glance at the form struggling in the whitened water, that dashed over the rocks, Tarsus Nightwell sprung forward and flung himself upon Piney Paul.

The boy, unable to fly, for the shore behind him seemed literally cut off by the waves, met the giant with great bravery.

The rifle, which had in many places assisted him in his descent, was quickly uplifted, and with all his might he struck at his antagonist.

But the giant's arm warded off the stroke, and the next moment the enemies had clenched.

Physically, Tarsus Nightwell was the master, but his size made his movements slow and unwieldy, while the boy, used to mountain life, had acquired the agility of the cougar.

He wrestled with the giant over the slippery rocks; now, by his tactics, forcing him back, and irritating him to no little degree. It was in vain that Nightwell tried to use his knife, with which he would have speedily ended the struggle; but he was kept busy attending to the hands that tugged at his throat.

The lion had found no mean foe in the wily panther, and at last he slipped and fell backward upon the rocks.

Stunned by the fall, Nightwell's gripe loosened and Piney Paul slid away, not a little bruised by the great hands of the man who lay so still at the edge of the leaping water.

"Creeks and crashes! I believe he's dead!" the boy exclaimed, looking at the giant. "Well, the world is better off, perhaps, and I have one enemy less. Now, out of this, Piney Paul, or there'll be two more to grapple with."

The last words had scarcely fallen from the youth's lips, when a plash in the water that shut off the shore along the cliff, made him turn quickly, and he saw half a dozen dark figures at his side.

"Indians, by crickets!" he cried, starting from the new foe and lifting his rifle. "Out of the fryingpan into the fire!"

"Stay!" cried a stern, strong voice, and the bow-string sent an arrow past his head, to be broken against the wall of rock. "The trail of Nokomis is here. The pale-faces are with him."

Piney Paul's reply was freighted with death,

for the flash of his rifle lit up the gorge for a moment, and a loud cry announced that the ball had performed its fatal mission.

Then the spot resounded with loud cries, and a shower of arrows fell around the flying boy. He hastened down the stream as fast as the rocks permitted.

The hunters of Nokomis were close upon him, now and then sending a shaft forward with the hope of arresting the flight of the foe.

"Where's the place that brought me down?" muttered Piney Paul. "If I could find that, there'd be a chance to get above these red-skins. Ha! here it is, by my life!"

He stopped, and throwing the gun upon his back, like an Alpine hunter, drew himself above the rocks by means of heavy vines, through which a short time before he had toilsomely descended to rescue his enemy, Cecil Crane.

The ascent was extra hazardous, for the vines, loosened in their rocky soil by his descent, might refuse to carry him upward to the woods above. But better the hazard than to fall into the hands of the savages.

The pursuing Indians passed under him, and soon returned bootless to their brethren. He heard their cries of anger over the victim of his rifle; but no sounds announced the discovery of either Nightwell or Cecil Crane.

Piney Paul toiled upward through the vines, which, growing in profusion there, afforded him a hiding place as well as the means of escape.

Up he slowly worked his way, the water sounding in his ears. The presence of the Indians in the gorge was manifest by certain sounds that could not mislead the fugitive.

"They're going to stay till it is light," he said; "and it will be light all along these rocks before I can get to the top. These old vines will have to hide me."

He stopped and looked up at the tall pines that crowned the edge of the gorge and seemed to lose themselves among the depths of the stars; then down to the waters, becoming visible in the increasing light. Like a globe of fire the great round moon crept out of the cataracts, as it were, and sent its beams into the ravine, revealing rocks, vines and all.

Piney Paul parted the vines and thrust his body into their density. The hunters were almost directly below him; they were coming down the gorge, evidently seeking him in the new light.

"Up to the woods," said an Indian, as the band halted at the foot of the vines. "Nokomis, the last Upas dog, is up among the trees; the pale-face fled no further down, for see, the water would be about him. There is no trail. He has crept up the vines."

The Indian's words thrust the perils of a new danger upon Piney Paul. The band were going to ascend to the forest above them by the vines in which he had taken refuge. They evidently were foes of the Upas chief, out on his trail.

Never did fugitive hide closer or squeeze his body into smaller space than Piney Paul at that moment of terror. He felt the vines shake with the weight of the first red-skin.

Skillfully the red-skin made his way upward over the vines and nearer and nearer to the boy.

Piney Paul noted his progress by the shaking and swaying of the vine; but the Indian passed the young red-slayer to the right, though so near that he could have been struck with a knife.

Once upon the cliff, the Indian told his companions that the vines were safe for scaling purposes, and the ascent of the others began.

The moon came up and saw the dark, cat-like figures crawling up the sides of the gorge. One by one they passed by Piney Paul's place of concealment, until the last one—the eighteenth—had left him undisturbed.

"Eighteen," he murmured, with a smile. "Nokomis must fight shy of them if he wants to keep his long hair out of their belts. They'll look for me in the woods above, and they'll find me, too, I reckon."

His last sentence was almost cut short by sounds that thrilled him to the marrow, and caused a hue of deathly pallor to come to his face. These sounds were the blows of a tomahawk, rapid and effective, that sent a quiver through the network of vines.

"Witches and snakes! here's a new go," ejaculated the boy. "The confounded red-skin is cutting the parent vine away, and I'll have to go down with it when it falls."

He did not look up to see the half-naked figure which leant over the cliff, and, hatchet in hand, was cutting the vine in twain. Such curiosity would have exposed his body and placed him in the hands of his foes.

As Cortez burned his ships to prevent retreat,

so the hunters of Nokomis were cutting the vines away.

The Indian labored manfully at his task, and the main stem was cut away. Paul grasped the strong tendrils in his embrace, and awaited the descent. He knew that his own weight was enough to force the living net downward.

Not long, and the mass shivered and loosened itself from the rocks; then gave way entirely, with a tearing noise, and plunged downward, carrying Piney Paul with it.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WITCH'S KNIFE.

NOT far from the scene of the thrilling incidents just narrated, and listening to the blows of the hatchet, stood two persons.

Hand in hand they stood in the shadows of the cliffs and the trees, and the light of the rising moon fell at their feet, but did not expose their figures.

One of the listeners was an Indian athlete, youthful, and naked to the waist, for the fragments of a hunting-frock, that clung to his broad shoulders, could not be called clothing. His companion was a young white girl, beautiful but pale, and she listened, with clenched lips, to the ringing blows.

Red Eagle and Little Arrow!

The latter looked fatigued; the forced flight from the little lake had told heavily upon her, but the endurance of the Indian did not seem impaired in the least. Despite the journey, he looked fresh and eager.

They heard the crashing of the mass of vines, as it fell down the cliff, carrying Piney Paul in its embrace, and the sound, loud and startling, made them exchange looks of wonder.

"The red-men cut the heavy vines away!" the young savage said. "They are the hunters of Nokomis; they do not mean to go back."

"We must not meet them!" said Little Arrow.

"No!" was the response. "Red Eagle has no friends in that tribe, though he is one of its braves. They do not trail him; but they would not turn away to save his scalp."

The white girl did not reply, and for some moments the red brave kept his lips sealed.

"Red Eagle knows not where to go," he said, in a puzzled manner. "To the south lies the great city of the Yengees, to the north the homes of the Englishmen. In either place the whites would fall in love with Little Arrow, and take her from the chief. Better back to Patagan."

The girl gave him an anxious look.

"But the hunters are between us!" she said.

Red Eagle drew his tomahawk.

"I am not a coward!" he cried. "The forest is as my lodge—I know every part of it. Back to the island! if the trail swarms with hunters! Red Eagle will face the old man and tell him that he loves Little Arrow—that he fled with her, but to save her!"

Little Arrow, or Cicely, the lost girl, crept trustingly to the young red-skin's side.

"I will follow!" she said, courageously. "Not to the Americans, nor to the English; but back to the island lodge!"

"To Patagan!" said Red Eagle, closing his lips firmly upon the last word.

The flight of the twain from Pelossee had ended; they resolved to return to the island and there—where they believed they would be safe—live out the love of their lives.

But there were foes between them and the hidden lodge; there were to be bloody leaves before Cicely's feet could press the island soil again.

Tramp! tramp! through the forest came the sounds of feet, that startled the lovers, and Red Eagle drew the girl further back into the shadows.

"The hunters of Nokomis!" he whispered. "The Brown Ptarmigan leads them; he limps."

Like specters the eighteen hunters moved through the wide belt of moonlight, watched in silence by the twain.

Gradually they passed from sight, and the sound of their feet died away.

Cicely looked up to her red lover with beaming thankfulness in her eyes.

But the danger had not passed.

There suddenly appeared in the wake of the hunters a figure which at first resembled the panther's, though it was larger than that beast's. It stooped over the fresh trail like the experienced hunter; but rose erect a few feet from the fugitives.

"They go down the river!" said the voice of the trailer. "Do they follow the white girl and her red lover, or are they the Indians who hunt the Upas?"

Cicely heard the voice and started from its sound. At the same time she recognized the

speaker, and a glance at Red Eagle told her that he, too, had made the same discovery.

Standing in the edge of the moonlight, erect and statue-like, appeared the person whose dark eyes the girl dreaded to encounter—Pelossee!

The red witch was still on her trail, and the countenance revealed by the moon, together with the long blade that glistened in her hand, caused the white girl to hope fervently that they might never meet again.

Noiselessly the young Red Eagle dropped his companion's arm. She looked up surprised at the action and saw the Indian ready to throw himself upon the huntress. He held a knife in his hand and his eyes flashed the mad passions of his heart upon the witch.

Cicely did not restrain him. He darted forward with a cougar-like spring before she could have lifted a hand for that purpose.

The distance had not been miscalculated, for, with a startling cry, Pelossee fell back beneath the force of the plunge.

She staggered toward the water shimmering in the weird moonlight, with the hand of the young Red Eagle at her throat. But she struggled while being forced back, and at last brought her prodigious strength into full play.

But the Mohican was no mean antagonist. A belief that Pelossee sought the life of Cicely nerved him to desperation, and he resolved that her trail should end on the banks of the Crazy river.

An anxious spectator of the combat, the white girl stood in the shadows with her eyes fastened upon the figures that struggled in the moonshine.

She started forward when Pelossee forced Red Eagle back by a momentary advantage; but when the youth dextrously turned the tables, she would stop and pray for his final success.

In one of her spells of eagerness she exposed her person to the quick eyes of Pelossee, and a wild cry fell from the witch's lips.

The sight of her victim seemed to lend her additional strength, and she turned to Red Eagle, panting for breath, with the fury of the tigress. Stout as the young brave was, he could not resist the new simoom of fury successfully. He wrenched himself from Pelossee and flung his body between her rage and Cicely. He planted himself firmly there with drawn knife and waited the attack.

It was not delayed.

With an exclamation of rage the savage princess sprung forward; but the Mohican met the shock with the old bravery of his famous tribe.

He struck for the heart that beat beneath Pelossee's vest, and blood stained his blade, but it was the blood of her right arm.

The next instant he was flung aside, and the Island Witch cleared the distance between him and Cicely with a single bound.

Cicely starting back with a shriek of terror essayed to fly, for she saw that Red Eagle did not rise from the ground, but the huntress was upon her.

"The white girl fled from Pelossee, but she could not escape!" was the exulting cry. "She shall go now to the Mountain Cat, and before his eyes Pelossee will take her life."

Cicely heard all with a white face, and her glance wandered to the young Mohican.

"The knife was in Pelossee's hand when she struck!" the witch said, noticing the inquiring glance. "The white girl shall see him."

She carried rather than led Cicely to the spot where in the moonlight lay the Mohican—the brave and chivalrous Red Eagle—with his scalplock on the ground, and his face paler than the natural hue.

"He has gone to Watchemenetoc!" said Pelossee, savagely.

"No! no!" cried the girl in anguish, as she was permitted to kneel over the Indian, whose eyes, rolling wildly, became fixed, and regarded her with a soft expression. "The Red Eagle is not dead! He will not die because Pelossee struck him!"

"The young Red Eagle will soon be on the never-ending trail," came the reply from the prostrate Indian, in tones that startled the listeners. "The knife of the witch found his life lodge. Little Arrow will live for the young white hunter now. He hunts her to take her to the home from which Patagan stole her long ago."

Cicely started.

"I have always been Patagan's child!" she cried.

The dying Indian slowly shook his head.

"No! The lost lodge is to the south. The Red Eagle would have kept Little Arrow here to love him. But his tongue is not forked now. He knows why the white men are in the forest.

The boy would take her back to the lodge; the man would drive the knife to her heart!"

The death rattle followed hard and ominously upon the last words, and a stream of blood gushed from the wound in the side.

There was a moment of silence, which Pelossee in her madness did not attempt to break.

All at once Red Eagle tried to rise, but his exhausted strength prevented, and he fell back against the foot of a pine, and died there with his eyes fixed on Cicely!

"The long trail!" said Pelossee, glancing significantly at the young chief. "Come, we must go."

"Go! Whither?" Cicely rose and faced the scarlet witch. "Whither are we going?" she demanded.

"To the mountain boy!" was the reply.

"I am ready now. He wants to take me back to the long-lost home. Red Eagle said so before he died."

For a moment Pelossee did not reply. She held Cicely at arm's length, and gazed strangely into her white face.

"Yes! yes!" she said, fiendishly. "The little Mountain Cat would take the white girl to the lost wigwam, and would make love to her there. But the knife shines between her and that wigwam. It is Pelossee who talks thus to the pale flower!"

Cicely could not misinterpret the light that gleamed in the red girl's eyes.

It was jealousy tinged with its almost inseparable companion—revenge.

"You would not kill me, Pelossee?" she said, laying her hand on the jealous one's arm. "We should be sisters—not enemies!"

The reply came quickly and full of bitterness.

"The Mountain Cat belongs to Pelossee! She saved him from the wolves."

Cicely did not reply; but wished herself far from the presence of the forest vixen.

"Pelossee knows where the boy is!" the red girl said, suddenly. "The vines went down with him when the Brown Ptarmigan cut them away."

The captive looked up into the speaker's face, at a loss to understand her.

A moment later the twain were hastening from the spot.

CHAPTER XVI.

OUT FROM THE VINES.

THE loosened vines, gathering into a mass almost spherical in form, dashed down the precipice and struck the rocks far below.

There it lay like a great ball partly unraveled and out of shape, washed by the water as it poured over the rocky bed of the gorge.

For several minutes there were no signs of life about the mass, but at last a singular figure emerged therefrom, and looked up.

"There was too much stuff around me!" said Piney Paul, smiling at his ludicrous situation. "Big fishes! I thought I would never stop. Over and over it went, until plump! splash! right into the water. Now I'm for getting out o' this. Nobody about, I guess."

With no little difficulty the Adirondack boy left the mass and found himself on shore.

Above him towered the cliff down whose sheer sides he had descended with the speed of a falling bomb. The top was deserted save by the stately pines whose overhanging branches he could see.

He did not desert the spot directly, but examined his surroundings with much care.

Thanks to the profusion of vines he had escaped without bodily injury, and, with rifle and knife, he felt tolerably safe.

"There's no use in stopping here when I've no business in the place. No more vines hereabouts to take me up to the trees, and there isn't a man in these parts who can scale the rocks. I wonder if this gorge doesn't end somewhere? I'll try it at any rate."

He started down the ravine for the purpose of finding a stairway to the pines overhead.

The place where he had encountered Cecil Crane and Nightwell was left behind, and, like a specter, he hurried on, hugging the cliffs and avoiding the water as much as possible.

At no place the mountain river might have been called a pretentious stream. Its boundaries were confined by the walls of the chasm, and above in numerous places trees bridged the opening.

Piney Paul at last discovered that the stream grew wider as he advanced, and he emerged unexpectedly from the gorge upon a comparatively level shore.

"Nature got tired of making rocks and quit here," he said, concerning the change. "Now

if I knew what become of Cecil Crane and Cicely, why I'd feel better. But the scamp is clean gone this time, I guess, for I pushed him into the river, and he was weak as a cat before. It was a mean trick. I was trying to save him when he told that giant to seize me and hold me still till he could cut my throat. If he didn't say just that, he meant it anyhow."

"Let me see," continued the boy, after a moment's pause. "Nokomis is hunted; the Indians want him. I am hunted; so are Cicely and the young red-skin. Pelossee is a hunter, too—bless me! if we all ar'n't hunting one another. Things are getting so mixed up that I can't tell t'other from which."

He would have started forward if a dark object lying in the moonshine to his left had not attracted his attention.

A quick step, accompanied by the precautionary click of the rifle-lock, brought him to the corpse of the Red Eagle.

"Here's a go!" Piney Paul said. "Got your end here, I see, boy. Creeks and crashes! I'd like to know who did this! If the girl was here, the person who fixed the Indian took her off. That looks plain as sunshine to a fellow. They had a tussle of it, I see;" he was stooping over the ground where Pelossee and the brave had fought. "There's the print of a foot bigger than Red Eagle's, but his has tramped it. If I could find that mark alone—if—here it is!"

He looked at the footprint in the yielding earth for a moment, and then started up.

"The witch was here!" he cried. "She killed the boy Indian, and, what is worst of all, she's carried Cicely away. Now the fear—the trouble—begins! Why did she leave me in the forest? Her eyes looked like coals, and she means to kill Cicely Draeme."

Piney Paul shuddered to think of the lost girl in the clutches of the jealous Pelossee.

He knew not how long the twain had been together.

Red Eagle was cold, and the rigidity of death was in his limbs.

"Back it is!" the boy said, discovering the trail of the witch and her captive. "They've gone back toward the gorge. Let them keep in the moonlight, and I can track them."

But the orb of night soon set and left the forest in the shade.

The night was drawing to a close and the darkness that precedes the long gray streaks of dawn lay about the ceaseless hunter.

He stopped, resolved to await the child of the morning.

The only sounds that oppressed his ear were the long cry of the mountain wolf, and the rush of the waters through the gorge.

Giving himself over to reflection, Piney Paul sunk at the foot of a pine, wearied but not disheartened.

The night crept from before the advancing day and with the first arrows of light, the mountain boy cast his eyes across the stream.

Voices had already prepared him for the sight that met his gaze; but it drove him quickly behind the tree against which he had rested his limbs.

Upon the opposite bank not a hundred feet away stood the hunters of Nokomis, the stealthy eighteen. They formed a circle about a scarlet figure, which, standing erect and in a defiant attitude, was easily recognizable as Nokomis, the last of his race!

The victim had been caged; the tiger was in the power of the hunters, and they would not spare.

"Caught at last!" ejaculated Piney Paul. "I know you left me and sold yourself to Cecil Crane for his gold; but you did me a good turn the other day, and I'm going to pay you back."

But the Upas was not alone amid the hunters. Near him, but not in the center of the ring, stood Simon Oldfoot, a captive also.

"I don't care that for you!" the boy continued, snapping his fingers as he looked at the white man. "You ain't any better than the man who hired you to come here. But I will get Nokomis out o' his fix."

The Indians seemed on the point of sacrificing the man who had eluded the vengeance of their tribe so long. There was no escape while every eye was fastened upon him.

Piney Paul raised his rifle and looked along the barrel.

"The fellow who cut the vines down is there!" he murmured. "He seems to stand on one foot; but he won't need any feet if the rifle doesn't miss. Good-by, Mr. Ptarmigan. You've cut your last vine off, I reckon."

A moment's silence followed the boy's words, and then came the crack of the rifle.

It was a death-shot, for the Brown Ptarmigan

went backward with a loud cry, and fell at the feet of the hunted Upas.

"Run, Nokomis! run!" shouted Piney Paul, showing himself. "Get up and dust, now or never!"

Nokomis did not hear the last words of advice, but, like a startled deer, he dashed through the ranks of his hunters, and fled like an arrow.

Simon Oldfoot followed the exile's example; but with poor success. He ran with sorry judgment, and suddenly found himself at the edge of the cliff!

There he stopped, and shrunk from the chasm.

"You ran the wrong way, Simon!" cried Piney Paul. "Go back and die like a man!"

A cry of rage burst from the giant's throat. He turned and found the Mohicans upon him. With uplifted hatchets they closed about him, and then and there the career of a hireling was brought to a close.

Meanwhile Nokomis had disappeared, with six pursuers at his heels.

"They might as well try to catch a streak o' daylight!" said Piney Paul. "One good turn deserves another always. We're square now, Nokomis!"

The name of the flying chief was still quivering the speaker's lips, when a shower of arrows fell around him.

"Too far for good work!" he cried, smiling at the barbed shafts. "Now it's my turn."

He stepped boldly into view with reloaded rifle.

The Indians divined his intention, and started back; but one of their number stopped, and dropped dead across the tomahawked corpse of Simon Oldfoot!

CHAPTER XVII.

A SHORT-LIVED TRIUMPH.

THROUGH a forest that stretched far and dark from the base of a mountain, crept, rather than walked, a white man, whose face was haggard, but cruel in its expression. His soiled garments had been torn by rocks and briars, and he seemed a fugitive flying from a posse of inveterate hunters.

That necessary weapon, the rifle, he did not possess; but in his hand he carried a long cudgel, which he trailed at his side. He was no experienced trailer, for every now and then the pine cones were crushed by his feet, and he started at the strange sounds thus made.

It was Cecil Crane, the hunter from the great city between the two rivers. He was alone, traversing the Adirondack woods, not flying from the hunters, but himself a determined hunter still, and at that moment on the trail.

Several weeks of misfortunes and thrilling vicissitudes had passed since he entered the wild mountainous region to ascertain how his hirelings, the two giants, had progressed in their search for long-lost Cicely Draeme. He had found them full of fears engendered by the wildness of the country, and the adventure described in our initial chapter. He discovered that he had mutinous men to control; but he had purchased their fealty, from time to time, by lavish promises of gold.

He was now alone. Tarsus Nightwell had not been seen since that night when Piney Paul fought him on the banks of the Crazy river, and, at the same time, Nokomis and Simon Oldfoot had disappeared. As for himself, the waves had been merciful, carrying him at terrible speed down the gorge, and, at last, by some singular freak, throwing him half dead upon the rocky shore to recover in the night, and to prosecute alone for another week the search for Cicely.

What motive controlled Cecil Crane's evil spirit? Why did he leave a luxurious home in New York city to lose himself to civilization among the wild grandeur of the Adirondacks, that he might unearth the hidden abode of the young Red Eagle's white love?

Gold!

From his lips shall presently fall the story of his avariciousness, and the fair being whom he has hunted so long and revengefully shall hear it for the first time.

The shadows lengthened about Cecil Crane as he slowly pursued his way. They at last became as one great pall overspreading his surroundings, and creeping darkly up the mountains.

"Yonder at last!" he said, halting suddenly, as the glimmer of a fire greeted his vision. "I thought I must be near the spot where I saw the Indian girl yesterday. If the other is only there, how lucky I will call myself. Caution! now, that's the word. I've been with the Indians enough to have learned something about the woods."

The light increased in size and intensity as the man advanced, and at last a long crawl through the dense woods brought him to a spot from whence the occupants of the little camp were visible.

Cecil Crane could scarcely believe the evidence of sight.

Seated on a log, and in the light of the fire, was a fair young white girl, whose garments revealed a story of forest life, and of long absence from the homes of her race. She was very beautiful to the solitary watcher; her golden hair fell to her shoulders in long damp folds, and she was running her white fingers through it in a manner which proclaimed her thoughts to be far away.

The eyes of the man flashed madly like those of the tiger, as well they might, for the end of the long trail seemed reached at last. Cicely Draeme sat before him! He knew it was she, though sixteen years had passed since he had last gazed upon her face. The stories brought mysteriously from the heart of the Adirondacks were not the idle inventions of the myth-loving Indians. The golden-haired fairy of the mountains was a reality. She was even now before Cecil Crane.

Not far away, preparing a mountain grouse for the palate, sat the other tenant of the camp—a large Indian girl, whose heart was in the task to which she had assigned herself. The sole weapon visible to Cecil Crane was the rifle that lay on the ground at her side. The woodland "spit" also lay near by, and the tempting grouse was almost ready to satisfy the appetites of the twain.

For several minutes the white hunter fastened his eyes on the girl who occupied the log, almost completely ignoring the presence of her red companion. He hunted Cicely, not Pelossee; he wanted the white girl, but if the red one interfered, why, he would not hesitate to drive a knife to her heart.

When he left the tree behind which he had secreted himself to view the camp, it was to inaugurate a crawl which would have been creditable to a Mohican brave. His movements described a half-circle with an objective point, which was the white girl.

Like the serpent approaching the feeding bird, Cecil Crane, bringing the caution of revenge and his forest cunning into play, neared the object of his long hunt.

Cicely was watching Pelossee roasting the grouse, and did not catch a sound that betrayed the spoiler's approach.

At last Cecil Crane crouched and hugged the ground. He was in the girl's shadow, thrown by the fire. She was a dark silhouette in the ruddy light.

The slender fingers still toyed with the luxurious golden locks, when, with a half-wolfish cry which he could not suppress, the eager crawler sprung forward and seized his prey!

Lifted from the log by Cecil Crane, the white girl uttered a shriek, which caused Pelossee to turn from her culinary operation and spring erect.

The island witch took in the situation of affairs at a glance, and started forward upon the impulse of the moment. But the hunter, jerking the knife from between his teeth, held it so menacingly near Cicely's heart that she stopped abruptly and looked on.

"Stand where you are, red witch!" Cecil Crane cried to the astounded Pelossee. "I've been hunting a long time for this child, and now that I have her, I am not going to give her up tamely. Go back and finish your bird. I want no intermeddling. Girl," to Cicely, "you don't know me?"

"No," was the reply. "But I knew you were hunting for me. Why am I hunted like a wolf? You know, and will you not tell me?"

Cecil Crane was puzzled by the look of intense curiosity that filled Cicely's eyes.

"Yes, I will tell you!" he answered, with a glance at Pelossee. "My name is Cecil Crane. Never heard it in these parts, I guess, unless the devilish boy shot it into your ears!"

"The mountain boy never told me anything."

"Which is deuced fortunate for your peace of mind!" was the reply. "A long time ago a man died in New York, and left a great deal of property to a little girl just out of her cradle. She was not his child, but she was near to him, nevertheless. He said in his will that if, at the age of fifteen, that heir was not in the city to claim the estate, it should pass to his brother's son. Hal! don't you begin to see into the matter, girl? or am I talking in riddles to you because you have lived so long among these mountains?"

Cicely did not reply. Her countenance, full of

anxiety and interest, told Cecil Crane that his words were not enigmas to her.

"Well, the girl did not appear when she became fifteen, and the nephew came into possession of the estate which to-day is a vast one even in that rich city. Do you want to know why she never appeared? Shortly after the opening of the will, an Indian was seen prowling around her home some twenty miles from the city, and one night both he and the child disappeared. The years passed away and the little girl became lost to the memory of the few who knew her. But at last strange stories came to the cities about a white person among these mountains—a girl who lived with an old Indian. The tales sounded like myths, but I believed them. I came here to prove them, and I know now that you are the girl who was carried away by the Indian. You cannot recollect that far back?"

"No!" was the answer. "I thought I had always lived with Patagan."

"Is that his name?" said Cecil Crane, anxiously. "He who stole you called himself Ocotoc. He was an ogreish-looking fellow."

"Patagan often talks of Ocotoc," Cicely said. "I wish I could lay my hands on the imp! Crane said hoarsely and with rising passion."

"He lied! lied basely! He said that you were dead, and yet I dare say he brought you here and sold you to Patagan."

"But what are you going to do?" asked Cicely seriously.

"That is getting at the matter!" flashed Cecil Crane. "What do you think I came here for? I am the nephew of the old man who willed you all his money. Some day or other you would be found by that meddling boy, and turn up suddenly in New York. There was another clause in that will that I haven't mentioned. Well, never mind! it wouldn't help you to know it. Don't you see what I'm driving at? You are in my way, curse you! You can make me a beggar—so confoundedly poor that the richest people in the city would quarrel for the first kick at me. This is plain talking, Cicely. I am a beggar; you can't misunderstand me!"

Misunderstand him when his eyes fairly danced in the fire that seemed to consume them.

"It cost me many thousands to get here!" he continued; "but the reward pays richly for the expenditure and my toils. I needn't keep my intentions back. I'm going to drive this knife clear through your heart. That's what I came here for!"

Cicely uttered a cry of horror and strove to break from the hunter's grasp; but he held her firmly with his left hand.

"When did the red trollop leave?" he cried, suddenly, noticing that Pelosée had mysteriously and without noise disappeared.

The spit, burned half in twain, was ready to let the grouse drop into the fire, but the Indian girl was not near to prevent the threatened catastrophe.

"I was a fool to let her get away!" Cecil said, again turning pale. "Was I so wrapped up in my talk as to be so foolish? She may be aiming the rifle at my breast now. Curse my more than empty-headed folly!"

For a moment he remained undecided how to act; but he covered his breast quickly with his captive and retreated from the firelight.

"It would be dangerous to lift the knife here!" he said in a low tone, which reached the girl's ears. "But in the woods I'll make my property secure, and then the others who want you can have you!"

The forest seemed to swallow Cecil Crane and his prisoner in its gloom. The grouse fell into the fire, and began to burn there.

Deeper into the woods the hunter went with vengeance in his eyes, and his hand on his knife. Cicely, resisting no longer, did not utter a word.

All at once there came a startling cry from the shaded depths, and then the sound of some one running deeper into the gloom.

The cry was not repeated; the very echoes, taken up on every side by the tone, seem to tell the story of some deed of blood, and ghastly crime.

Suddenly the feet of the unseen runner neared the fire. Like an antelope the unknown bounded forward and all at once came into the light.

It was Cecil Crane, and alone!

There were footsteps behind him, and he caught sight of a female figure, clad in a fantastic Indian dress, and hastening forward.

All this in the moment of his halt in the firelight, as if to recover strength for a resumption of the flight.

"I did it!" he cried, defiantly, and with a fiendish laugh. "Now let the demoness catch

me if she can. All the imps in these old mountains have failed to baffle me!"

With a wild bound he started forward again and his foot was crossing the line of light when the crack of a rifle echoed shrilly and clear in the forest aisles.

The last word of his triumphant sentence ceased to quiver his lips, for a cry so often the precursor of death drove it hence, and he fell backward to the very edge of the forest fire!

"I told him the vultures and wolves should quarrel over his carcass!" cried a voice, and the next moment Piney Paul bounded into the lighted arena.

He turned quickly to greet the springing form of Pelosée, but stopped with a strange cry, and, starting back, gazed with horror at the burden that hung from the witch's arms.

"My God! is this the end of the trail?" he cried, as Pelosée came forward. "Tell me that Cicely is not dead. If she is, I wish Cecil Crane had a thousand lives, that I might take them every one!"

Pelosée did not reply; but laid Cicely, or Little Arrow, at Piney Paul's feet, and then looked up with the unmistakable triumph of jealousy in her sparkling eyes!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END OF THE TRAIL.

WHEN Piney Paul darted forward, it was to lift Cicely from the ground, and to look into her expressionless face.

"Dead it is!" he cried, glancing at Pelosée, who waited impatiently for a confirmation of her hopes. "Who did this, girl—you or Cecil Crane?"

"I, sir!" came the unexpected reply from the white man, who had partially raised his body from the ground. "Dead, the brat is, you say, Piney Paul? Look again and tell me truly!"

Cicely dropped from the boy's embrace, and with a revengeful cry he turned upon Cecil Crane.

But his hand was not lifted against his pale-faced foe, for the villain fell back crying—"Dead! dead! thank heaven! they can't take it from Blanche!"

The mountain boy stopped, for Pelosée's arm was between him and his foe.

"The long trail—see!" she said. "He lies as still as Pelosée's bear in the forest!"

Sure enough, Cecil Crane was lying motionless at the fire, and a glance served to show Piney Paul that he was dead!

"Come!" he said to the witch, as he took up Cicely's body in his arms again. "We will seek the cave now. All my trails have ended!"

He turned away, followed by the scarlet girl, and the figures passed from the firelight.

"How long ago was it, Paul?"

"Did he not tell you that night?"

"Yes; but I want to hear it from your lips. Pelosée is not here now."

"She left the cave last night, so do not let her bother your thoughts. It was fifteen years ago, or more. I do not recollect the matter; but when I grew up they told me all about you. They said that Cecil Crane was at the bottom of the trickery, and when word came from these mountains that a white girl, guarded by an old Indian, dwelt among them, I came hither to find you. I need not tell you that Cecil Crane came, too, for he believed that you were his cousin, the person who could take all his ill-gotten wealth away, and bring upon his head the obloquy which he deserved. We hunted and fought one another for you. I know now why Ocotoc knew of you, for at Cecil Crane's instigation he carried you from home and gave you to Patagan. That night I thought you were dead; but how glad I was to discover that the knife had pierced your arm, and not your heart."

"And we will go to the city now?"

"When I have seen Ocotoc and heard from his lips the story of Cecil Crane's villainy."

"What! Will you venture upon that dreadful island again?"

"Yes. Would you not like to see old Patagan once more?"

"He was very kind to me," was the reply. "He would give me up to you, and tell me to follow you back to the houses of my people."

It was in the pictured cave once described to the reader that the foregoing conversation took place.

Cicely reclined on a couch of skins over which the mellow light of a pine fire fell, and seated beside her was Piney Paul listening with manifest joy to the words that fell from her lips.

Cecil Crane had misdirected his last blow in the shadow of the Adirondack woods. Startled

by the approach of Pelosée he had aimed a blow at Cicely's heart, but the blade penetrated her arm, thus saving her life.

And he had paid for all his villainy and heartless scheming!

For several days the white girl had lain on the couch watched unceasingly by Piney Paul, who resolved that he would not leave her side until he had placed her in possession of her rights in New York.

Pelosée had followed him to the cave. The Indian girl noticed with no sign of joy Cicely's return to consciousness and health. Her eyes fell evilly upon the zealous watcher by the couch, and more than once the boy caught her casting angry glances at Cicely.

He felt that the witch still required watching—that the dangers of the forest were not yet passed.

But let us return to the youthful twain in the cave.

They were its sole occupants, and their conversation for a long time was not interrupted.

All at once, a cry that caused the boy to leap to his feet came into the cavern. It seemed to come from a throat not far away, and beneath the rocky roof of the corridor leading from the water side. It was a cry of mingled pain and defiance!

Bounding toward the chamber, rifle in hand, Piney Paul was suddenly confronted by a hideous human which he with difficulty recognized as Nokomis.

The terrible aspect which the last Upas presented had been created by the demon of fire. His long hair had been burned to the skull, and his body, repulsively disfigured by flames, was enough to drive the boy back!

A wild cry pealed from the Indian's throat when his eyes fell upon the mountain boy, and brandishing the tomahawk which he gripped in his right hand, he turned to the opening with the desperation of a tiger brought to bay by relentless pursuers.

The next minute Piney Paul was at his side.

"They caught Nokomis in the woods!" the hunted Indian said. "They tied him to a pine, and piled sticks around him. Then they shot arrows into his arms and legs and burned his long hair away. But Nokomis lifted his voice to the Great Spirit for strength, and it came; it went through his body hot and swift. He broke the sinews and kicked the fire away; but it is in his limbs yet. He fled and they followed. Nokomis broke the arrows off in his body, and they kept him back. Mountain Cat, they are here. Hist! they can trail Nokomis by his blood and the scent of his burned limbs. Go back and fly with the flower of the lost lodge."

"No!" said Piney Paul, determinedly. "I will defend her here!"

There were unmistakable signs of the approach of Nokomis's hunters. They had tracked the last Upas to the pictured cave, and were entering it, eager to finish the work begun in the forest.

The corridor that led to the water made a gradual slope from the spot where the defenders stood. It was narrow, high and dark, and was illly revealed by the light of the fire.

The hunters were in the corridor; they were creeping cautiously forward like panthers upon their prey. To them the location of the cave was unknown; but they expected to find Nokomis soon and finish him. This was their ambition.

For several minutes the two defenders listened to the sounds that betrayed the presence of the Mohicans.

Piney Paul glided to the fire and took therefrom a flaming brand.

"I'll open the ball!" he said to the chief.

Nokomis took the torch and threw it suddenly and with a shout down the corridor. It alighted with precision amid the group of consulting braves who were thus revealed, and the next instant the report of Piney Paul's rifle was followed by a death-cry!

The torch was quickly seized by the Mohicans and dashed again and again against the wall of the corridor until it was extinguished.

But by this time the rifle had been reloaded, and a second ball went crashing through the brain of another red hunter!

"Now Nokomis meets the Mohican wolves!" cried the scorched red-skin, and before Piney Paul could restrain him, he darted into the passage with a yell that would have been creditable to the Prince of Tophet.

"The fellow's mad!" cried the boy. "Gimminy and crickets! there'll be some tough work now!"

The "tough work" began even while he was speaking, for the wild cries of combat and the

blows told him that Nokomis, the hunted, was fighting his last battle.

Breathless, but with ready rifle, the little mountain hunter stood at the mouth of the corridor listening to the conflict which he could not see. He knew that the Indian hunters had closed in upon the Upas like wolves upon the weakened quarry, for there were no mad blows now, only the noise of the death-grapple of giants.

The struggle ceased so abruptly that Piney Paul started and sprang to the fire for a torch.

With one in his hand he returned to the spot and flung it, blazing wildly, down the passage. It revealed no men struggling for the mastery; but instead an object which bore a semblance to the human form was creeping slowly toward him.

It came on until the glitter of the deep-set eyes told the boy that it was the Upas.

With a great effort he dragged himself from the opening and uttered a cry of triumph as he cast something, grotesque in its hideousness, at the boy's feet.

"Scalps! by the holy stars!" cried Piney Paul, recognizing the trophies. "And you came out best at last, Nokomis?"

There was no reply, but the smile told the boy that his words were understood.

Nokomis flung his bloody knife upon the heap; then, actuated by some horrid impulse, crept forward, and picking up the blade, drove it revengefully through the scalps, effectually pinning them to the ground!

It was the last act of his life, for with his hand still clutching the knife as if he would hold the scalps down, he gave one gasp and fell over on his side.

Nokomis, the hunted, was dead; but he lay in triumph upon the twelve scalps of his inveterate trailers!

"Nokomis, you were brave," said Piney Paul, "but you left me for Cecil Crane's gold. Praps you wouldn't be here if you had stuck to me. But it's too late now. I'll leave you here to guard this place."

The boy turned back to Cicely, who had, with much anxiety and interest, awaited the end of the battle.

There was an eagerness in her face which instantly attracted the boy's attention.

"Paul," she said, in a whisper, "there is a person in yon shadow. Twice I have caught a movement there. I am not feverish now. I have been awake all the time."

The boy turned toward the dark spot indicated by the girl, and instantly stepped forward.

But he had not advanced far before a figure stepped from the shadows, and with flashing eyes and a knife stood before him.

It was Pelosée!

Piney Paul threw himself between the witch and Cicely, for the light in the eyes of the former and the presence of the knife betrayed her intention.

"No!" cried Piney Paul, meeting her look with defiance. "Your jealousy has got the upper hand of you. I want no following now. If you offer to kill Cicely, I'll drive a bullet through you. I told you this once before. I will not tell you again! Go back to Ocotoc, and tell him that the girl whom he stole long ago is going back to her people. I was going to see him, but what he knows, I guess I know well enough!"

Pelosée did not reply; but stood undecided where she had halted.

"Look up and see the face of Watchemene-toc!" cried Piney Paul, pointing toward the ceiling of the cavern. "He wants to see you touch the white girl!"

The red witch looked up and uttered a wild cry of horror and fright.

The eyes of the pictured ogre seemed to scintillate with true fiendishness, and the bat-like wings appeared to move!

With a cry, she started back; the knife dropped from her hands, and, springing over the dead body of Nokomis, she disappeared!

"It's the last of her!" said Piney Paul. "She'll go back to Ocotoc, and perhaps fling herself among the wolves. Creeks and crashes! the old Harry must have held my hand when I made his picture up there!"

Safety at last seemed breaking over the head of Cicely Draeme. She held out her hand to Piney Paul, and said:

"I feel that the trail is leading us out of the woods. The lodge of my white people does not seem far away."

It was not distant, though many miles stretched their weary lengths between it and the cave.

There was commotion in the fashionable so-

ciety of early New York when Piney Paul, accompanied by Cicely, clad in her fantastic forest garb, appeared and claimed the wealth of Cecil Crane.

Blanche, the villain's haughty wife, tried to laugh the twain's pretensions down; but Paul, who stood in her luxurious drawing-room, brought his fist down upon the table and cried with emphasis, while his eyes flashed fire:

"Laughing proves nothing! Creeks and crashes! the girl's got to have her rights, and I'm going to see that she gets every shilling due her. I mean business! The will gives your wealth to her at this day. Say she is not Cicely Draeme, and I'll tramp back there and bring old Ocotoc himself here. Ha! that hits the mark! Business is business! You must give up all. This house suits Cicely and me. We want to live here by and by."

The boy was the hero in the city, as he had been in the forest.

He carried his point, and the wealth belonging to Cicely was restored to her.

Ocotoc's services were not required beyond the confines of his island, and Pelosée, by returning suddenly, startled his ogreship.

As for Patagan, he did not seek Cicely; but made the best of her absence, and soon afterward died.

Tarsus Nightwell was never heard from after his last encounter with Piney Paul. Like Simon Oldfoot, he undoubtedly perished in the wilderness, a victim to the love of gold.

Many years afterward a party of men found a wonderful cave among the cliffs of the Adirondacks; it seemed a veritable galaxy of pictures, and the roof was covered by the head and wings of a demon!

But the cave was not tenanted, except by a lot of bones, which marked the last resting-place of Nokomis.

I need not add that Piney Paul—Paul Burleigh, as his true name was—wedded the Little Arrow of the Adirondacks. The reader has anticipated this happy denouement.

Thus the wild mountains lost their little hunter, and Right, triumphing in the wilderness, thrived in the city, to the delight of honest people!

THE END.

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